WAHHABISM AND THE RISE OF THE NEW SALAFISTS

THEOLOGY, POWER AND SUNNI ISLAM

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For my parents

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION, ABBREVIATION AND LINKS

The transliteration used in the book is based on the modified *Encyclopaedia of Islam* system: *qaf* = q not k, *jim* = j not dj, the *l* of *al-* is not assimilated to the following consonant, *ta marbuta* is rendered *a* not *ah*. The letter *'ayn* is rendered by the opening single quote ' and the *hamza* in the middle of a word is rendered by the closing single quote '. There are no diacritics. The *a* of *al-* is not elided (example: *li-al-nashr wa al-tawzi'*). In titles of references in Arabic, only the first word is capitalised (unless the title contains personal names or names of places which will then be capitalised too).

In the citations and in the titles of references in English or other languages, the transliteration used by the original authors has been left as is. The word *hadith* may take an 's' in those instances but in the book it is found in the singular form.

Translations of the Qur'an are based on Abdel Haleem, Muhammad A. *The Quran*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Translations from the Arabic are mine unless specified. Whenever a published translation of the source was available,

I used this translation, sometimes adapting it (this is always mentioned).

The only abbreviation used in the book is *EI²*, which stands for Lewis, B., V.L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*. 13 vols (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2009).

For electronic references of webpages, I have used the website archive.org and the URL shortener bit.ly to provide stable access to material that is susceptible to disappear over time (for example, in the case of websites held by single individuals, or forum discussions).

THEOLOGICAL GLOSSARY

Ambiguous verses: see *mutashabih*

'Aqida: doctrine, beliefs of the Muslims. It encompasses knowledge about God, but also about *the Prophets and eschatology.*

Ash'aris: followers of the theological school founded on the teachings of Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d.935). Most of the Muslim scholars throughout centuries were affiliated to this school. Its main theological tenets include: considering the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as the ultimate sources of knowledge; considering the reason as a witness of the truthfulness of Islam, without being the primary source (i.e., this means that no teaching from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* would contradict conclusions drawn from rational argument); the notion of *kasb* (acquisition), whereby the human's actions are create by God but acquired by the human being who is responsible for his choices; the uncreatedness of the Qur'an as an essential Attribute of God, but the acceptation that the books and recitations of the Qur'an are created; the permissibility of interpreting the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an.

Maturidis: followers of the theological school founded on the teachings of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d.944). The second major

theological school in Islam, based on similar principles to that of the *Ash'ari* school, albeit using some different terminology.

Muhkam verses: verses of the Qur'an that can only bear one meaning in Arabic. They are called 'explicit verses' throughout this book. They do not leave room for interpretation.

Mutashabih verses: verses of the Qur'an that can carry two meanings or more, liguistically. They are called 'ambiguous verses' throughout the book. The literal meaning of the ambiguous verses attributed to God is often a human characteristic. The major theological schools of Islam, such as the *Ash'aris* and the *Maturidis*, have allowed interpretations of these ambiguous verses (see below *ta'wil*), whereas some factions, such as the Wahhabis and some figures associated to the *Hanbali* school before them, have considered it a blameworthy act that makes the person misguided.

Tafwid: accepting the revealed words of the Qur'an while not giving an exact meaning. It is sometimes considered as partial interpreting, as *tafwid* is a rejection of the literal meaning, but not going as far as *ta'wil* where a precise meaning is given to the word.

Tajsim/Mujassima/Tajsim: to attribute a body to God. A *Mujassima* is someone who believes in *tajsim*. Some consider that it is not *tajsim* to attribute hands and feet to God as long as one believes that they are different from the hands and feet of human beings. However, others consider that understanding ambiguous verses according to their literal meaning is already *tajsim* because the literal meaning of the word *yad* in Arabic is the physical hand. So in the second case, even if one said they believed God has a hand different from ours, they coud be accused of *tajsim*.

Tamthil: see *tashbih*

Tashbih: anthropomorphism, which is to believe that God resembles His creations, or attributing the attributes of human beings to God.

Ta'til: disbelieving in the Attributes of God or denying them.

Ta'wil: interpretation of Qur'anic verses considering the existing meanings of the Arabic words used in the Qur'an and the context of those verses. Some have defined it as being equal to refusing the revelation. Others argue it is a necessity to interpret on occasion.

INTRODUCTION

On 5 June 2017, a new diplomatic crisis erupted in the Middle East, with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE severing ties with Qatar and blaming it for fuelling instability in the region. As this book goes to print, the crisis is still unfolding.

A lesser-known event took place one week prior to this, on 29 May, when a group of 200 clerics from Saudi Arabia asked the Qatari royal family to change the name of their official state mosque in Doha, currently called the Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab mosque. They argued that the teachings of the mosque are not in line with the heritage of the founder of Wahhabism, of whom most of them are descendants.[1] This little incident reveals that the legacy of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab is still, 225 years after his death, at the centre of many debates in the Muslim world. Some of these debates are at the core of what this book is about: the fight around the notions of 'orthodoxy' in Islam, or Sunnism. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has Wahhabism as its core and foundation, is often described in newspapers as the leader of the Sunni camp, opposed to Iran, which is a *Shi'i* country, but isn't this description too simple? This book will shed light on this debate by demonstrating how the very notion of Sunni Islam

is being rewritten and revised by some of those who claim to defend it.

Many political and social scientists, religious scholars and journalists have tried to understand the nuances of the movement that Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab founded, Wahhabism, and its off-shoots. The works of these individuals have brought us closer to a typology that allows a better understanding of these phenomena. With few exceptions,[2] most of the scholarly work produced today on movements linked to Wahhabism focuses on political issues such as their affiliations, their group dynamics, their sub-divisions and their position on the use of violence.[3] This book, however, provides a study of Wahhabism from a theological standpoint as opposed to a political one. Drawn from my PhD thesis, this book, in contrast to existing publications, will examine the criterion that unifies all the different factions that are influenced by Wahhabism: the particulars of their belief in God's nature, names and attributes. Through that angle, it will enable a study of a phenomenon that started with the rise of Wahhabism and which has accelerated in recent decades: the gradual replacement of the definition of Sunni Islam (often referred to as 'Mainstream Islam', although the book will address the fact that it means different things to different people) and its historical references.

Outline of the book

The book will start with a definition of the notion of '*Salaf*' (Predecessors) and why this notion is central to the building of 'orthodoxy in Islam'. This will explain why different factions constantly evoke what scholars from the *Salaf* period have said on any issue, as a way to give weight to their position. There is also a short glossary of the main Arabic terms that are recurrent in the book (see Introduction). The book will thereafter summarise some of the main theological issues that have been

discussed throughout Islamic history and how they led to the formation of the *Ash'ari* and the *Maturidi* schools of thought. The importance for Muslims of the issue of the understanding of the Attributes of God will also be highlighted (Chapter 1). How Muslims between the end of the blessed period of the *Salaf* and the rise of Wahhabism, that is, approximately between the eleventh century and the eighteenth century, viewed the position of the Predecessors on this issue will be studied. We will see that a consensus had emerged on how the verses on the Attributes of God were to be understood, and that this consensus was challenged by specific individuals with a *Hanbali* background (Chapter 2). A history of Wahhabism and of the naming of its movement will then be introduced (Chapter 3) before looking at how the arrival of this movement has revived this debate (Chapter 4). The alternative vision of history that Wahhabis, often named Salafists, are offering to the world in the name of Sunnism, as a direct consequence of their stance on the Attributes of God, will then be presented (Chapter 5).

Some case studies from the internet on the consequences of this debate will then follow (Chapter 6), before the conclusion, which will summarise the need for a better comprehension of the notion of Sunnism in view of the battleground that this notion has now become.

Definition of '*Salaf*'

Definitions taken from Arabic dictionaries, the Qur'an and Hadith

The term *salaf* in Arabic comes from the triliteral Arabic root 's l f' and means the 'previous group', the group which was before, (*al-jama'a al-mutaqaddimun*), as mentioned by Ibn Manzur.[4] The *salaf* are literally 'those who preceded us'. The term can also mean all the good deeds performed by a person during their life. Those actions are then called a *salaf* in their favour.[5] It also describes a type

of Islamic business dealing which contains a prepayment as its common feature.[6]

The noun *salaf* is mentioned in the Qur'an [43:55–56]: 'When they provoked Us, We punished and drowned them all: We made them a lesson and an example for later people.'[7] The verb *salafa* can be found in four verses with the aforementioned meaning, that is, what happened in the past, and always in the context of the past deeds of people who will be forgiven by God, as the deeds happened before the people accepted the revelation Q [2:275, 4:22, 5:95, 8:38]. The noun is also found in numerous *hadith*,[8] some pertaining to the type of aforementioned Islamic dealing, some concerning supplications that can be made in favour of dead people (who existed before us, and therefore in the supplication referred to as *salaf*).

Whether in the *Qur'an* or in the *Hadith*, the meanings found in religious texts for the term *Salaf* are not the 'acquired' meaning of the term by *istilah*: usage. This refers to the meaning that the term has started to bear because of successive usage, and which is the meaning that happens to be the most employed nowadays. The acquired meaning is the one we are interested in for this study. It is derived from a *hadith* that does not actually contain the word *salaf*, but about which there is a consensus that it refers to the *Salaf*.

Salaf *as: the first three generations after the Prophet Muhammad*

The acquired meaning that we use today is taken from a *hadith* and its different versions. One of the most common versions of this *hadith* means: 'The best people among you are those of my generation, then those who followed, then those who followed them.'[9] Some narrators expressed doubts about the number of times that the Prophet said 'and those who followed them', that is, they were not sure if he said it twice or thrice.[10] However, as mentioned by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani and others,[11] there are many narrations where no doubt is expressed, and in which he said it twice, making a total of three generations: the Prophet's generation and the two that

followed. Some of these chains of narration were attributed to the highest levels of reliability. There are other narrations that are also considered reliable, and in which the Prophet would have clearly mentioned the phrases meaning 'and the second generation, and the third generation'.[12]

The main commentaries on this *hadith* all contain an attempt to determine who can be included in the three generations mentioned by the Prophet. The authors of the commentaries start with a discussion of the term *qarn*, which usually means a 'century', and can mostly be taken here to mean a 'generation', that is, 'the people of an equivalent time-span'.[13] The number of years that a generation can count has also been debated: some said 40, some 80, some 100,[14] others suggested 70 or 80,[15] while others have suggested as few as ten years.[16]

Al-Nawawi (d.1277),[17] the *Shafi'i* scholar still renowned today for his religious works and author of a commentary on the collection of *hadith* of Imam Muslim (one of the six collections considered sound by the Sunnis), lists all the different possible definitions of 'generations' in his notes on this *hadith*. He concludes the matter by saying that 'what is certain is that his "generation" are the Companions (the *Sahaba*), the second generation are the Followers of the Companions (the *Tabi'in*) and the third are the Followers of the Followers (the *atba' at-Tabi'in*)'.[18] This is the widely accepted meaning of the three *qarn* mentioned in this *hadith* and its different versions. It should be noted that none of the commentators on the *hadith* explained the three generations as being the *Salaf*, that is, the word *salaf* is not to be found in the explanations of these *hadith*.[19]

It is not easy to pinpoint exactly when the word *Salaf* started to be directly associated with the meaning of this particular *hadith*. Afsaruddin, in her monograph on 'the First Muslims', gives the following suggestion:

The concept of the 'Pious Forbears' very likely originates in this report [*referring to the* hadith *on the first three generations*] but the *hadith* itself does not use the actual Arabic term *al-salaf al-salih*.

What may be the earliest usage of this compound term, although not in these precise words, occurs in a *hadith* recorded in the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855). According to this *hadith*, when his wife Zaynab died, the Prophet said at her funeral,

> Cling [addressing the deceased Zaynab] to Uthman ibn Maz'un, our virtuous and pious predecessor (*salafina al-salih al-khayr*).

Uthman bin Maz'un [. . .] won distinction in Islam for his early conversion, emigration to Abyssinia, and abstemious habits. So inclined was he to praying and fasting that Muhammad had to counsel him to moderate such practices.

> 'Indeed,' said the Prophet, 'your eyes have their rights over you, and your body has its rights, and your family has its rights. So pray, and sleep, and fast, and break fast'.

Generous prophetic praise for the predeceased Uthman, as encoded in the words *al-salih* and *al-khayr* occur in the report cited above, testify to his Islamic precedence and harbingers the application of these terms to the Companions in general.[20]

In spite of this difficulty to assess the exact origins of the phrase, there is no doubt that nowadays there is an association between the consecrated word *salaf* and the meaning of 'the three generations' mentioned in it, as can be seen in a book of Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti[21] on Salafism, where he starts by a definition of the *Salaf* which refers to this *hadith*: 'the Companions, the Followers and the Followers of the Followers'.[22] The ideological opponents of al-Buti, such as the members of the Permanent committee of Saudi Arabia (which issues legal rulings on different issues) also give a similar definition 'the *Salaf* are the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the imams of guidance from the first three centuries (*qurun*).'[23]

In the commentaries of the *hadith*, each generation is as follows: the first generation started from the revelation (13 years before the

start of the *Hijri* calendar), up to the death of the last believer who had seen the Prophet, even if it was only for a moment (which is the definition of a companion generally agreed upon, i.e., by *jumhur*).[24] It would last for around 100 years, the uncertainty resulting from the date of death of the companion Abu Tafil (or Tufayl).[25] On the same premise, the second generation counted 70 or 80 years, and the third generation about 50. There is a general agreement that this whole period is between 220 and 240 years. Scholars born within this period would be considered as part of the *Salaf* even though they might have died after 300 AH, that is, up until around 930 AD. A good example of that is the case of the *Hanafi* jurist Abu Ja'far at-Tahawi who is considered a Salafi scholar by both the Wahhabis and their theological opponents because he was born in 853 and died in 933.[26] Being part of this era means, for some factions, that a particular person's sayings and actions can reliably be taken into account when defining what is and what is not orthodox. From the Wahhabis' point of view, for a person to have lived in the *Salaf* period is not enough to prove his or her religious soundness. However, belonging to this period while being a scholar of notable repute gives a particular significance to this scholar's actions and opinions, because the *Salaf* were (and are) considered central in constructing the notion of Islamic orthodoxy.

Salaf *as: the central notion in constructing orthodoxy*

In contrast to Shi'is, who consider that some of the first companions betrayed the Prophet and did not respect his will of the Prophet with regards to his succession, Sunnis generally consider the first among the companions and supporters of the Prophet in Medina (respectively called the *Sahaba* and the *Ansar*) the best people of the Muslim community. They use as a proof a verse from the Qur'an: 'Allah approves of the first among the *Muhajirun* [the Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina following the injunction of the Prophet] and the first among the *Ansar* [the inhabitants of Medina

who welcomed the emigrants in their city and helped the Prophet].'
[9:100]. The *hadith* quoted in the previous section further
emphasises, for Sunni commentators, the importance of taking the
first three generations from the era of the Prophet as an ideal and a
reference. For Sunnis, what the scholars of the *Salaf* did, said or
agreed upon can be a foundation to follow and a reference for future
generations. The *Salaf* luminaries are often quoted as examples of
piety, good character, strength of faith and individuals who had
unwavering confidence in the Prophet. To illustrate, we can note
this paragraph in the *Risala* of the *Maliki* scholar Ibn Abi Zayd al-
Qayrawani (d.996),[27] where he underlines the importance of
choosing the *Salaf* as examples to follow:

> One must submit to the *sunnahs* [the acts of the Prophet and
> his companions]. They are not to be contradicted by personal
> opinions, nor are they to be opposed by analogical reasoning.
> That which the right acting first generations interpreted,
> we take as our interpretation. That which they acted upon,
> we act upon, and that which they abandoned, we abandon.[28]

A few paragraphs later, al-Qayrawani adds:

> 'Al-Nakha'i said: 'Even if I had seen the Companions making
> *wudu* up to the wrists, I would have performed *wudu* like that,
> although I recite [in the Qur'an] up to the elbows'. That is
> because they cannot be suspected of abandoning *sunnahs*. They
> were the masters (*arbab*) of knowledge and the most eager of
> Allah's people to follow the Messenger of Allah, may Allah
> bless him and grant him peace. The only one who thinks bad
> of them is someone who has a doubt about his *deen*.[29]

These quotes emphasise why the example of the Companions is
so important. They witnessed the message of the Prophet and saw
his practice. Therefore, they are believed to have had a better

understanding of the revelation than any other group of people. The scholars of the *Salaf* are also considered models of piety and devoutness.

The *Salaf*, the Salafists and the issue of the Attributes of God

Despite the *Salaf*'s position as a reference throughout the centuries, there was no specific group known by the name '*Salafi*' until the early twentieth century. At that time, reformists in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere in the Muslim world adopted the name *Salafi* as they made attempts to adapt to modernity while maintaining the use of Islamic concepts and ideals. The term '*Salafi*' later on, as will be shown in Chapter 3, will become the name of choice for the group then known as Wahhabis. This book aims to provide a better understanding and awareness of the theological background of all the different groups claiming nowadays to be *Salafis*, that is, the Salafists. Although the actions of the different groups of Salafists are influenced by varying factors (such as their views on political and social issues), their theological tenets are often given inadequate attention in current research and this study aims to address this gap. The Salafists blame previous and current Sunni scholars for having allowed interpretation of the Attributes of God, which they regard as a sort of a denial of the revelation, and it is the consequences of this stance on the definition of Sunnism that are the topic of this book.

Limitations of the book

This book does not set out to present a detailed study of the beliefs and sayings of the scholars of the *Salaf* period. Rather, it concentrates upon how the scholars of the *Salaf* have been perceived and defined throughout Islamic history, from immediately after the period of the *Salaf* ended until the present

time. The book establishes that throughout history, Sunni scholars had agreed upon the belief that it was permissible to interpret the Qur'anic verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God. The Salafists contend that this was never the case and their arguments will be presented too.

This work does not contest the internal differences among the Salafists that are currently being studied by political analysts and other specialists in the field of counter-terrorism. It is limited to theological arguments and there is no attempt to deny the existence of other criteria by which more refined typologies can be made, or to provide an exhaustive list of the sub-groups within each faction. The focus of the book is the theological arguments about God and His Attributes, and the position of the Salafists on these issues.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The origins of the main theological schools

Reinhart writes, whilst retracing the history of Sunnism, that 'Sunnism is a religious movement and, as such, it has a history within more general Islamic religious history.' In trying to build an overview of this history, looking at the emergence of the theological schools can help.

Shortly after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632, theological debates started to appear in the Muslim community. Originally, some of them were brought by political disputes. For example, when 'Ali became the caliph, a group called the *Kharijis* opposed his caliphate on the basis that they considered him a sinner. Some others, however, did not want to open the issue of personal religious qualifications and considered that anyone who professes Islam was de facto a Muslim. This led to wider debates about whether committing sins precluded someone from entering Paradise or not and became known as the issue of 'faith versus work'. One other debate consisted of discussing whether the Qur'an was created or not. A group called the *Mu'tazila* held that the Qur'an was a created message sent by God to Prophet

Muhammad and not part of the essence of God, whereas others refused that position, until this debate became a *'cause célèbre'*[1] in Islamic theology and almost gave its name to the subject-matter 'theology' itself by calling it '*kalam*', which in Arabic means 'speech'.[2] Another well-known debate was the one between free will and predestination. In that debate, two polarised positions were formed by the ninth century: one held by the *Mu'tazila* whereby man is considered to be created by God with a total free will, which would explain why there is a judgement in the hereafter, and one held by people associating themselves with the study of *hadith*, whereby man is considered almost like a 'puppet' with no independent choice, as everything is meant to happen by the Will of God. It is at that time that Muslim theologians, such as Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Ash'ari (d.935) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d.944), tried to find a middle position that would acknowledge the centrality of the Islamic scriptures, but without contradicting the requirements of the use of rational reasoning. Lapidus summarises the situation as such:

> Dissatisfied with the excesses of Mu'tazili rationalism, and appalled by the constricting literalism of the people of *hadith*, ninth and tenth century Muslim theologians tried to find a middle ground consistent with emphasis on the importance of *hadith*, but preserving some role for reason in the discussion of theological issues. Several such compromises were elaborated, but the most important in the history of Muslim theology was the work of al-Ash'ari (d.935).[3]

She adds:

> For example, on the problem of the createdness of the Quran, he held that it was uncreated but (. . .) pointed out that any particular copy of the Quran was created. On the

question of free will, al-Ash'ari held that all human acts are decided or created by God, but that man, by *kasb* (acquisition), has a certain responsibility for them. God is the ultimate author of man's actions, but man is an instrument of and participant in these actions.[4]

Al-Ash'ari is one of the main theologians whose ideas and teachings helped shape what became known as Sunni theology. Formerly a great student of the *Mu'tazili* master al-Jubba'i in Basra, he would have succeeded him if it were not for a change of heart that took place around 912, whereby he joined the ranks of those subsequently called '*Ahl al-Sunna*', that is, the Sunnis. He is said to have dreamed about the Prophet several times and that these dreams prompted him to ask questions to his *Mu'tazili* teacher, the answers to which he could not provide. He soon abandoned *Mu'tazili* affiliations and dedicated his time to developing rational arguments that were also in compliance with the teachings of the Qur'an and of the *hadith*.

This took place during the period of the Abbasids, that is, from the ninth century until the end of the eleventh. By the eleventh century, the Saljuq caliphate saw a consolidation of what became known as Sunnism. This consolidation has been described as a 'Sunni recentering' as it led to a 'homogenization of religious life, a process through which Muslim scholars and others strove (not always with success) to eliminate various sources of contention within the Islamic community.'[5]

The importance of the issue of the Attributes of God

In this section, we will explore the issue of the Attributes of God and its centrality in terms of the Islamic creed. Although it might at first seem as peripheral or trivial, the issue of how to understand the ambiguous verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God has been considered important enough by some prominent

Muslim authors to declare as not belonging to the Muslim community any person with diverging views on it. Seelye, the translator of the heresiographical book *al-Farq bayna l-firaq* by Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi (d.1037),[6] warned the reader in her introduction that in some parts, the book made 'dull reading' because of discussions about, as she put it, 'whether Allah touches the Throne or not'. Seelye compares the debate to the 'pettiness [of] the scholastic debates of the medieval Christian church, regarding the number of angels able to stand on a pin-point at one time, or the consequences attending a mouse's eating the consecrated host'.[7] However, the issue of touching the Throne or not was actually considered by the author whose work she translated as a vital point which could determine or nullify the Islamic faith of a person. This is why what the *Salaf*'s view on this issue is particularly important.

Summary of *Ash'ari* theological arguments

A summary of the *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* worldview and explanation of the oneness of God will help present why this issue defined one's classification by the theologians as an orthodox Muslim. *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* theological positions have been dominant from almost immediately after the *Salaf*. *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* books have long been part of the core reading material of the most famous Sunni universities of the Muslim world.[8] The most famous scholars of the Muslim community from the tenth century have been either active *Ash'aris* or, if theology was not their specialisation, greatly influenced by *Ash'ari*sm whenever they dealt with ambiguous verses, or whenever matters of the creed were touched upon. As explained earlier, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d.935) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d.944) are two theologians deemed by their followers to have brought a systematic vocabulary and methodology to the explanation of Muslim beliefs, in line with what the scholars of the *Salaf* used to say. Al-Ash'ari and al-

Maturidi are considered part of the *Salaf* period, as they were both born during the third century AH. These two theologians are deemed to have done for *'aqida*, that is, issues of belief, what the founders of the four Sunni schools have done for *fiqh* [jurisprudence]: that is, to systemise it in a coherent, organised way and with a comprehensive vocabulary, while at the same time aligning themselves to the methodology of the *Salaf*.

In the conception of the world of the *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars,[9] the entire universe is everything except God.[10] As all entities are created by God, they all have a beginning given to them by God, whereas God is the only One who does not have a beginning.[11] To ask the question 'If God created everything, then who created Him?' would equate to saying that the Creator is a creation. Indeed, a creation is something that did not exist and then came to be. As it was created, this necessitates that it was brought from the state of non-existence into existence. Bringing something from the state of non-existence into the state of existence is the meaning of creating, which can only be applied to God. The Arab linguists recognise that *khalaqa* – to create – can, as in English, be used to mean 'to produce or to fabricate,' when applied to human beings, but they point out that the meaning of 'bringing things from the state of non-existence into existence' should be used only in reference to God. This is because humans can produce chairs and tables from wood, but cannot make wood appear from nothing. This would be creating, and this type of creating applies only to the Creator, God.[12] Therefore, if all created things have in common the fact that they have a beginning, to state that God has a beginning would equate to saying that the Creator is yet another creation. This would necessarily imply that there is no difference between the two. In summary, if all created things have in common the attribute of having a beginning, then it must be the case that God does not have this attribute.[13] Similarly, anything which is attributed to God cannot be attributed to the creation.[14] If the Creator and the

creations had even one attribute in common then God would not be the Creator. This is substantiated by a *hadith* of the Prophet considered sound (*sahih*): 'God existed and there was nothing else'.[15] The Prophet explicitly mentions that God existed and nothing else did, that is, no sky, earth, Throne, physical entity, time or place. Time and place constitute 'other than God' and the *hadith* states that there was nothing 'other than God'. The maxim according to which God exists without time and place originates from this reasoning. He does not need time and place as it is impossible that He would change.[16]

The *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars emphasise that the Qur'an expresses that God does not need any of His creation as He is perfect. To illustrate this, they quoted the Qur'anic verse 'Indeed Allah is independent of need for the worlds (*al-'alamin*).' [3:97] The *Ash'aris* define the worlds as being composed of only two elements: bodies (*ajsam*, pl. *jism*) and attributes (*a'rad*, pl. *'arad*).[17] A body is anything that has a length, width and depth. An atom is the smallest particle of substance and it is indivisible.[18] When two atoms are joined, this is called a body.[19] Bodies are themselves subdivided into two categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible bodies are those that can be grasped by the hand, like trees or human beings, and intangible bodies are those that the hand cannot grasp, like light, souls and the wind. As God created all bodies, whether tangible or intangible, He is necessarily entirely different from these bodies. The same reasoning applies to the attributes (*'arad*). Attributes do not exist by themselves as separate entities. Unlike bodies, they need a body with which to be associated. An example of an attribute is colour. We cannot speak of blue as an independent agent, but rather we attribute objects in the physical world with being blue. Other attributes include temperature, movement, motionlessness and feeling. Indeed, we cannot talk about anger without associating it with the body, that is, the person in whom it exists ('So and so is angry.'). The same can be said for movement; it only occurs in bodies. God is also the Creator of all

the attributes. As attributes can only exist in or on a body, they are specific to the creations and the Creator is entirely free of having even one of them. The Creator is not attributed with any of the attributes of the creations, and the creations are not attributed with any of the attributes of God.

To sum up the *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* worldview, if everything is either a body or an attribute and God is the Creator of both, God must be entirely different to both. In addition, He has revealed in the Qur'an that He does not need the worlds and that the worlds comprise of only bodies and attributes. God is not attributed with a shape or form that is different to those with which we are familiar. Similarly, God is not attributed with being a body that is different to those with which we are familiar. Rather, He does not have a shape, form or body. This is because He exists absolutely without a 'how', that is, without a manner. This is known as the Sunni doctrine of the *bila-kayf* – literally, 'without a how'. The *bila-kayf* doctrine is not to be explained as 'we do not know how God is' or 'we cannot know how God is', as is found in some books and articles.[20] Rather it is a complete negation of the existence of a 'how' because God is the Creator of the 'how' (*kayf*, that is, the manners, shapes, forms and attributes, etc.). This is a key issue in Sunni Islamic doctrine. The very reason why the theologians coined the phrase '*bila-kayf*' was to negate the attribution of a manner to God, rather than to express a lack of knowledge of the manner.

Among the sentences used by *Ash'ari* scholars to illustrate the fact that God exists without a 'how' is the phrase, 'God is different from whatever you imagine in your mind.'[21] Given that everything the imagination can conceive is necessarily a body or an attribute, one cannot imagine the Reality of the One who created both, and who is neither a body nor an attribute. To clarify the distinction between imagination and reason, the *Ash'ari* scholars use the following example: It is known from the Qur'an that both light and darkness are creations, as it is mentioned that

God created both [cf Q 53:1]. It follows that there must have been a time when they did not exist, as all creations have a beginning, but nevertheless, our imaginations are unable to conceive a time when there was neither light nor darkness. Typically, when we can see something it is because it is illuminated. If we cannot see it, it is because there is no light. To us, darkness is the absence of light and there is no way for our imagination to overcome this limitation. Indeed, our reason tells us that there was a time when no darkness and no light existed as these are mere creations that have a beginning. Our reason is able to conceive of notions that are beyond the limits of our imagination. The *Ash'ari* scholars would encourage people to refrain from using their imagination to find the Reality of God as they believe this can never succeed. However, use of the reason also dictates that there is a Creator and that this Creator is entirely different from His creation.

'God exists without a place'

Another aspect of the creed is the assertion that God exists without a place.[22] The main *Ash'ari/Maturidi* argument is that the Creator existed before the creation of any place, that He existed without a place and that He continues to exist without a place. He exists after having created places, without being in need of them, as He is absolutely independent of all need (*al-qiyamu bi al-nafs*). It is within this framework that the *Ash'aris* and *Maturidis* reject the notion of God sitting or being established on His Throne, as sitting in or being on something necessitates being in a place.

The *Ash'aris* and *Maturidis* view the belief that God is established in the sky or on the Throne as not only a misinterpretation of the Qur'an, but also an error that leads to the worship of other than God. Excommunication has been pronounced in condemnation of groups that were seen as holding the heretical view that God exists on His Throne or in the sky, or

that He is a body or has organs.[23] This is mostly because the Qur'an and the Prophetic *hadith* contain phrases in Arabic that literally mean that God has hands, feet, a face and a shin, and that He is settled on the Throne. These verses and *hadith* are referred to as ambiguous (*mutashabih*). Given the serious repercussions to the Muslim faith, it is not surprising to observe some relatively lengthy discussions on this issue. This is the reason why the *Salaf*'s view on this issue is of particular significance.

Ambiguous verses and *hadiths*

Fundamental to the understanding of this notion is Verse 7, Chapter 3, because it mentions that there are two types of verses in the Qur'an: the explicit (*muhkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashabih*). It reads:

> It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning – these are the cornerstone of the Scripture – and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pinpoint a specific meaning – only God knows the true meaning – while those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'.

This verse has been the object of lengthy explanations in Qur'anic exegeses and books dedicated to explaining the Islamic creed.[24] The explicit verses are verses that can only have one meaning, according to the Arabic language, or that have a well-known meaning. The ambiguous verses can have different meanings, according the Arabic language, and their meanings may not be immediately clear to the reader, but not inaccessible to a person with the appropriate knowledge.[25] In Q [3:7], the explicit verses are called *Umm al-Kitab*, that is, the foundation of the Book. It is

mentioned that people with corrupt hearts will fixate upon the ambiguous verses, spreading dissension as they pursue their interpretation (*ta'wil*), when 'only God knows the true meaning'. It is this last part of the verse which has been much debated. If *ta'wil* means interpretation, then the verse would be a condemnation of interpretation. This is how Salafists understand this verse and it is the main basis for their prohibition upon any type of interpretation. However, the *Ash'ari* scholars are of the view that, in this instance, *ta'wil* means 'the Day of Judgement' rather than 'interpretation'. Their main basis for this explanation is another verse from the Qur'an in which the noun '*ta'wil*' clearly refers to the Day of Judgement.[26] According to them, this proves that the word '*ta'wil*' in the original verse also means 'Day of Judgement'.[27]

Another possible interpretation of the verse arises from reading it up to the word '*fi al–'ilm*', that is, '*wa ma ya'lamu ta'wilahu illa Allah wa al-rasikhuna fi al-'ilm.*' If one stops at '*fi al-'ilm*', the meaning of the verse becomes, 'And no one knows the true meaning of the ambiguous verses except God *and* those who are firmly grounded in knowledge.' The term '*ta'wilahu*', according to this reading, would then refer to the interpretation of the ambiguous verses that can have different meanings in the Arabic language, especially those concerning the Attributes of God.[28] In summary, the *Ash'aris* do not understand from this verse that the interpretation of the ambiguous verses dealing with the Attributes of God is prohibited. On the contrary, some of them have vehemently denied that the verse Q [3:7] could indicate that only God knows the true meaning of the ambiguous verses. Among those, Abu Nasr al-Qushayri, an *Ash'ari* theologian and *Shafi'i* jurist (d.1120) wrote in his *al-Tadhkira al-sharqiyya*, as reproduced by Murtada al-Zabidi (d.1791) in his commentary of *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* by al-Ghazali (d.1111):

Concerning the verse '*wa ma ya'lamu ta'wilahu illa Allah*' [if one stops at the word *Allah* in his recitation], it means

that no one knows the exact time of occurrence of the Day of Judgment except Allah. Allah revealed this verse because the non-Muslims asked the Prophet about when the Day of Judgment will occur. So [here] the ambiguous verses are signs of the Unseen (*ghayb*) because no one knows the end and results of matters except Allah. Because Allah the Exalted said '*Hal yandhuruna illa ta'wilah, yawma ya'ti ta'wiluh*' (Q 7:53), 'What are they waiting for but the fulfilment of its final Prophecy?'

Of course it would not be permissible for anyone to say that there are, in the Qur'an, verses which none of the creation can know their meanings. Isn't it a statement which degrades the status of Prophecy? This statement contains degrading the status of prophecy and belittling the Prophet, peace be upon him, because it claims that the Prophet did not know the meaning of the verses pertaining to the Attributes of Allah ta'ala, and that he ordered people to believe in what cannot be known.

Didn't Allah say in the Qur'an '*bi-lisanin 'arabiyyin mubin*': 'Allah revealed the Qur'an in a clear Arabic language'? So, according to the anthropomorphists' claim, they are saying that this is a lie, because they claim that the Arabs do not know the meanings of these verses, and if this were the case, then it would not be in clear Arabic.

And we know that the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language, so how can anyone claim that the Qur'an contains verses the meanings of which the Arabs do not know? If this was the case, these verses would not be in compliance with the language of the Arabs. And what do you say about a claim that leads to contradicting Allah ta'ala?

Moreover, the Prophet called the people to worship Allah the Exalted. So if in his call to his community there was something which none knows its meaning except Allah, then the non-Muslims would have said to him 'O Muhammad, tell

us first who you want us to worship and what are you saying?'
Because it is not possible to believe in something which one
does not know the attributes of, and to say that the Prophet
called people to believe in a God whose attributes none can
know their meanings is a very abhorrent matter that no
Muslim can even imagine, because ignorance of the attributes
of something entails the ignorance of the thing itself.[29]

The relevance of this explanation is in preventing those that the
Ash'aris considered to be anthropomorphists from using the verse
to support a claim that interpretation is forbidden. Abu Nasr ibn
al-Qushayri argues that it is unacceptable to believe that the
Prophet was unable to explain the Attributes of God. According
to him, this is the reason why the verse cannot be used to prove
that interpretation is forbidden. The *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars
have the understanding that the Qur'an does not contain any
prohibition against detailed interpretation of ambiguous verses.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS

This chapter will examine how Muslims have understood the question of the divine attributes and their interpretation, from the end of the period of the *Salaf*, that is, from the twelfth century, until the rise of Wahhabism in the eighteenth century. This chapter will look at how centuries of scholarship in the 'classical' period of Islam have perceived the issue of the Attributes of God.

From as early as the twelfth century onwards, it was clear that there was already a codified way of explaining the attitude of the *Salaf*, regarding the Attributes of God, among the theologians (*mutakallimun*), but also among scholars dealing with other subjects, such as those who interpreted the Qur'an or the Prophetic texts. However, this consensus had been contested at a specific time in history, around the time of the classical figure Ibn Taymiyya.

The *Salaf* and the Attributes of God: perceptions of scholars towards a consensus on the position of the *Salaf*

In this part, we will expose how Muslim scholars between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries used to define the attitude of the *Salaf* towards the ambiguous verses dealing with the Attributes of God.

Additional information on excerpts

This is a presentation of the sources of excerpts used in this chapter and their authors, in chronological order of the authors' dates of death:

– *Kitab al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*[1] by al-Bayhaqi (d.1066), who was a *Shafi'i* scholar who specialised in *hadith* transmission, and an *Ash'ari* in the field of theology.[2] He was praised by al-Juwayni (d.1085) in his efforts in support of the *Shafi'i* doctrine. He was a prolific influential writer, said to have written 1000 fascicules.

– *al-'Aqida al-nizamiyya*[3] by Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (d.1085), who was the Imam of the Two Holy Sanctuaries, a celebrated *Shafi'i* and *Ash'ari* scholar.[4] He was notably among the teachers of al-Ghazali (d.1111), the famous *Ash'ari* and *Sufi* scholar. This short treatise is an *Ash'ari* summary of the Muslim creed. His theological book detailing rational arguments for the Muslim creed according to *Ash'ari* principles, *Kitab al-Irshad ila qawati' al-adilla fi usul al-i'tiqad*,[5] will also be used.

– *Tabsira al-adilla*[6] by Maymun ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (d.1114), a theologian whose book outlines principles of the creed.[7]

– *Kitab al-milal wa al-nihal*[8] by al-Shahrastani (d.1153), an *Ash'ari* theologian. The book *al-Milal*, as *Kitab al-milal wa al-nihal* is commonly known, and for which he became famous, is an ambitious attempt to retrace the history of all the different religious beliefs of mankind known to him.[9] He mentions the *Salaf* with regards to some creedal points.

– *Kitab akhbar al-sifat*[10] and *Daf' shubah al-tashbih*[11] by the *Hanbali* traditionist Ibn al-Jawzi (d.1200), one of the most famous scholars of Baghdad at his time. He borrowed enough concepts from the thinking and interpreting of the *Ash'aris* to be classified as a personality with strong influences from *Ash'aris*m. In these two books, he strongly disagreed over the interpretation of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an with other notable persons

from within his own school of thought. The fact that he also had some criticisms about *Ash'aris*m makes him and his works even more interesting to study, as this shows that, despite divergences over certain issues between scholars, there was a wide agreement over how to understand the ambiguous verses.[12]

– *al-Mulha fi i'tiqad ahl al-haqq*,[13] by al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Sulami (d.1262), who was believed to have reached the level of *mujtahid* (a Muslim scholar who possesses the aptitude to form his own judgement on questions concerning the Islamic Law using personal effort) and who was an *Ash'ari* and *Shafi'i* scholar. The treatise is dedicated to theological notions and has a passage on the creed of the *Salaf*. The same text is found in another book published under the title *al-'Aqa'id*,[14] which gathers creedal points by al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam.[15]

– *Sharh sahih Muslim*[16] by al-Nawawi (d.1277), a Syrian *Shafi'i* jurist whose works, such as the Forty *hadith* and the Gardens of the Virtuous Ones (*Riyad al-salihin*), are still widely reprinted and translated. Nowadays, he is respected by a vast array of Muslim groups, which is why using his works in this section is useful. His description of the position of the *Salaf* on the ambiguous verses is mentioned in his commentary of *Sahih Muslim*.[17]

– *al-Muqaddima*[18] by the famous Andalusian historian Ibn Khaldun[19] (d.1406), who shows remarkable detail and understanding of theological issues in his presentation of the creed of the *Salaf*.

– *Fath al-Bari bi-sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*[20] by the famous Egyptian *hadith* scholar Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani[21] (d.1449). This work has become a reference in terms of *hadith* commentary. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani narrates several detailed interpretations of ambiguous *hadith* and, occasionally, Quranic verses. He was a famous historian and judge whose works are highly regarded by Sunni scholars.

– *al-Minhaj al-qawim*[22] by Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d.1567), an Egyptian *Shafi'i* scholar who studied in the University of

al-Azhar under the supervision of the *Sufi* and specialist of the *Shafi'i* school, Zakariyya al-Ansari[23] (d.1520). He also studied under other teachers who were themselves disciples of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d.1449) and of the *Shafi'i* traditionist al-Suyuti[24] (d.1505). This book is an explanation of a small work of *Shafi'i* jurisprudence, entitled *al-Muqaddima al-hadramiyya*, and also contains a definition of the *Salaf*.[25]

- *Mirqat al-mafatih*[26] by 'Ali al-Qari (d.1605), a celebrated *Hanafi Maturidi* scholar, who wrote a widely available explanation of *al-Fiqh al-akbar* by Abu Hanifa (d.767).

- *Isharat al-Maram 'ala 'ibarat al-Imam*[27] by Kamal al-Din al-Bayadi (d.1687), a *Hanafi* scholar. This book was also reedited and commented on by al-Kawthari (d.1951).[28] It contains an explanation of *Salaf* positions.

The quotes will now be given in chronological order, with some comments to highlight the significance of the content.

al-Bayhaqi (d.1066)

In his book *al-Asma wa al-Sifat*, when commenting on a *hadith* which attributes *al-dahak* to God (literally: laughing), al-Bayhaqi mentions a few words about how the *Salaf* approached this text, as well as similar texts:

> The Predecessors [*Salaf*] among our companions understood from these *hadith* that they were falling among the 'strange' ones, and that [the kind of topics which they were] talking about [were best left to] God the Exalted. They did not preoccupy themselves with the exegesis of the word *dahak*, believing in the fact that God does not have organs, points of pronunciation, and that it is not permissible to attribute Him with teeth or a mouth. God is far removed from resembling the creations.[29]

Here, al-Bayhaqi is of the view that the *Salaf* would not interpret ambiguous verses in detail, but that they would negate that God has organs. This quote shows that just after the period of the *Salaf*, there was already a portrayal of the *Salaf* by a recognised scholar as not interpreting the ambiguous verses.

al-Juwayni (d.1085)

Al-Juwayni said in his book *al-'Aqida al-nizamiyya*:

> The imams of the *Salaf* chose to abstain from *ta'wil* (detailed interpretation), they put the literal meanings where they belong and they left the meanings to God the Exalted.[30]

Al-Juwayni develops the following argument in his *Irshad*:

> Someone might ask why not take the verse in its apparent sense, instead of resorting to allegorical interpretation, by arguing that it is one the ambiguous verses whose interpretation only God knows.[31] To that we reply: If the purpose of this question is to keep [*istawa*] [literally: seating] strictly within the limits of what is meant when using it literally, then it surely means 'to become firmly established' and that results necessarily in a doctrine of corporeality. Any doubt in this matter falls under the same judgment and ends up as belief in corporeality. Deciding that the sense 'to become firmly established' is impossible supposes on the contrary, that the apparent meaning is not applicable in this case. And thus those who demand that the import of the verse remain within its apparent sense have no justification for this position.[32]

Al-Juwayni is a reference in classical theology. In these excerpts, he suggests that the scholars of the *Salaf* did not delve into interpretation and he advocates leaving out the apparent meanings of the ambiguous verses on the Attributes of God.

al-Nasafi (d.1114)

Al-Nasafi mentions the word *Salaf* in the first page of the book chosen for the sample,[33] stating that in this book, he is only following what the shaykhs before him explained. In addition, in this section dedicated to the ambiguous verses, he explains what the position of those scholars was:

> Our shaykhs, may Allah have mercy upon them, have differed [regarding the ambiguous texts]. Some of them took the view that the obligation regarding those verses and *hadith* was to believe in them as they came, with faith and submission, to believe in their soundness, and not to preoccupy ourselves about their modality or the search for this modality, with a firm belief that Allah, may He be exalted, is not a body, does not resemble the creations (. . .) This has been narrated from Muhammad ibn al-Hasan: indeed Nasir ibn Yahya al-Balkhi narrates from 'Umar ibn Isma'il ibn Himad ibn Abu Hanifah from Muhammad ibn al-Hasan that he was asked about those verses and narrations mentioning the attributes of Allah, and the apparent meaning of which would lead to anthropomorphism, and he said: 'We go through them as they came, we believe in them and we do not say "how" and "when"'. And this view was also adopted by Malik ibn Anas, the imam of the people of al-Madinah, and by Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak and Abou Mu'adh Khalid ibn Sulayman the companion of Sufyan al-Thawri, and by a group of scholars from the people of *hadith* like Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ishaq ibn Ibrahim and Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, and Abu Dawud al-Sijistani. It has been narrated from Malik ibn Anas, may Allah have mercy upon him, that he was asked about His saying, may He be exalted: *'al-Rahman 'ala l-'arsh istawa'* [literally: the Merciful is established over the Throne] and he said 'the *Istawa* is not unknown and the *kayf* is not

conceivable and the question about it is an innovation.' [i.e., the definition of the word *istawa* is not unknown, but he did not precisely mention which one he intended, and there is no 'how' (*kayf*) to this act of *istawa*, as it is not conceivable that God had a '*how*']. None of them busied himself interpreting anything from these verses and narrations.[34]

And some of them [i.e., a second group of scholars from 'Our shaykhs'] preoccupied themselves with extracting the meaning of these verses and narrations according to what they contain as meanings which do not contradict the proofs of the Oneness of God and the explicit verses. Thereafter, in those cases where the word would only bear (apart from the explicit meaning) one meaning which complies with the proofs, they will decree that this is what is meant by God. And for those expressions which would carry more than one suitable meaning, they did not decide in favour of any in particular as being what was meant, because of the absence of a decisive proof which would lead to choose only one of them. They would prevent themselves from confirming this for Allah without a proof forcing them to do so and they would say: 'Yes, the meaning of some of these expressions is not the apparent one'.[35]

Although the extract above does not contain the word '*salaf*' as such, all the scholars taken as a reference in al-Nasafi's text are exclusively from the period of the *Salaf*, and it is in the chapter regarding anthropomorphism, which is the subject on which the reference to the *Salaf* is common to both *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars. Al-Nasafi ends his chapter by asking the readers to consult the works of Al-Ash'ari and specifically to the famous *Ash'ari* scholar, Ibn Furak[36] (d.1015), for more information on the details of the meanings of such texts.

Al-Nasafi also gives more details about the methods of those who interpret: they would affirm that their interpretation is the

actual meaning of the verse only if it turns out that once the literal meaning has been discarded, there is only one possible meaning for this text. However, if it appears that there are several suitable meanings left for this text, then they do not confirm any one of them in particular as being the one intended. Al-Nasafi highlights the fact that the common feature between those who interpret in detail and those who do not is that they all confirm that the meaning of the ambiguous verses is not the literal meaning.

al-Shahrastani (d.1153)

The same aspect of the *Salaf*'s attitude is underlined in *al-Milal wa al-nihal*, by al-Shahrastani:

> [Al-Ash'ari] holds also that the [terms] '*yadayn*' (literally: two hands), and '*wajh*' (literally: face) are attributes that are reported of God; for, as he explains, revelation speaks of them, and, therefore, they must be accepted as they are revealed. He follows the *Salaf* in not attempting to interpret them, though according to one opinion reported of him, he allows interpretation.[37]

He adds, about the *Salaf*:

> As for Ahmad b. Hanbal and Dawud b. 'Ali al-Asfahani and a group of imams of the *Salaf*, they followed the way of the early tradionalists (*ashab al-hadith*) of the Salaf, such as Malik b. Anas and Muqatil b. Sulaiman. They took a safe path, saying 'We believe in whatever is reported from the Book and the *Sunna*, and we do not try to interpret it, knowing for certain that God does not resemble any created things, and that all the images we form of Him are created by Him and formed by Him'. They avoided anthropomorphism, *tashbih*, to such an extent that they said that if a man moved his hand while reading the verse

'Khalaqtu bi-yadayy' [which would literally mean 'that I [God] have created with My hands']; or if he pointed with his two fingers while reporting the *hadith* of the Prophet '*Qalbu l-Mu'min bayna asba'ayn min asabi' al-Rahman*' [which would literally mean 'the heart of the believer is between the fingers of ar-Rahman'], his hand must be cut off and the two fingers torn out.[38]

Al-Shahrastani also considers that the *Salaf* did not take the literal meanings of ambiguous verses. The *Salaf* are believed to have avoided any detailed interpretation and, at the same time, they negated meanings specific to the creation.

Ibn al-Jawzi (d.1200)

Ibn al-Jawzi's *Daf' shubah al-tashbih*, on refuting what he considered anthropomorphic positions, is a good example of the continued debate that raged over the legacy of the *Salaf*. Did they or did they not interpret the ambiguous verses? Did they really say that these texts should be understood according to their apparent meaning when the apparent meaning leads to anthropomorphism? If they did not interpret them in detail, was it because they believed it to be forbidden or for some other reason? Ibn al-Jawzi explains:

If someone should ask why the *salaf* refused to interpret scriptural texts and [held] instead that these latter be permitted to stand as they are, our answer is that they did so for three reasons. In the first place, these texts were recited [without explanation] in order to focus attention on the reality of God's existence. When they are interpreted, this does not happen, given the fact that some of these texts contain expressions that do, [when explained] require a metaphorical interpretation. Thus, for example, the verse '*Fa ja'a Rabbuka*' [literally: Your Lord arrived] refers to the

coming of His command. Ahmad ibn Hanbal said, 'The proofs of reason lead to this conclusion, for movement cannot be attributed to Him.'[39] Secondly, if a term like 'yad' [literally: hand] had been explained metaphorically to mean 'power', this latter might have been construed in such a way as to include the notion of potentiality [*quwwa*], and so could have risked diverting attention away from what is acceptable. Thirdly, if the *salaf* had adopted a metaphorical method of exegesis, the breach would have widened and the result would have been confusion.[40]

The reasons Ibn al-Jawzi gives to explain the attitude of the *Salaf* who did not favour detailed interpretation are all linked to the prevailing circumstances of their era. In essence, he explains that the scholars of the *Salaf* did not, generally, interpret in detail, not because they could not do it or because they considered it blameworthy, but because, at their time, it was the best solution not to. This helps explain why the scholars of the *Khalaf* resorted to detailed interpretation. The circumstances had changed and people's understanding had weakened. The only detailed interpretation Ibn al-Jawzi mentions was given by the founder of the school he followed, Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Like al-Nawawi, ibn al-Jawzi is showing that the practice of detailed interpretations did exist at the time of the *Salaf*, a point which is denied by today's Salafists.

al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam (d.1262)

'Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam al-Sulami asserts, after having described what it meant to 'leave the meaning to God' (*tafwid*):

> The foregoing forms the general principles of al-Ash'ari's doctrine – may Allah have mercy on him – as well as those of the *Salaf* or Predecessors and the people of the Path (*tariqa*) and the Truth.[41]

He adds:

> The school of the [*Salaf*] is but the upholding of Allah's
> oneness (*al-tawhid*) and His transcendence (*al-tanzih*),
> without ascribing a body to Him (*al-tajsim*) nor likening
> Him to creation (*al-tashbih*). Likewise, all the innovators
> claim that they follow the school of the [*Salaf*] (. . .). How
> can it be foisted upon the *Salaf* that they believed in
> ascribing a body to Allah and likening Him to creation, or
> that they kept quiet when innovations appeared (. . .)?[42]

The author describes the method of the *Salaf* as 'leaving the
meaning to God'. He also gives a reason to explain why every
innovator claims to be upon the way of the *Salaf*: it is because of
the purity of the creed that those early followers held.

al-Nawawi (d.1277)

In his commentary on the collection of *hadith* by Muslim, al-
Nawawi explains the *hadith* called '*Hadith al-nuzul*', that is, the
hadith of the descent. *Hadith al-nuzul* is among the ambiguous
texts. If taken literally, this *hadith* would mean that during the
third part of the night, God descends to Earth to grant the wishes
to those who are awake praying or supplicating. This is how
al-Nawawi approaches this text:

> With respect to this *hadith* (*hadith al-nuzul*) and the like of it
> from the *hadiths* containing the Divine Attributes and their
> verses, there are two well-known approaches: the approach of
> most of the *Salaf* and some of the speculative theologians
> (*mutakallimun*) is to believe in their true nature according to
> what befits Him, Exalted Be He, and that their literal
> meanings that are commonly acknowledged with reference
> to us (*dhahiriha*) are not intended. We are to not discuss
> their meanings but all the while believing in God's being

exalted, Glory to Him, from having all the other characteristics of creation such as transference from place to place (*intiqal*) and movements [*harakat*].

The second is the approach of most of the speculative theologians and a portion of the *Salaf*. It is related about Malik and Awza'i that they said they are to be interpreted in a way befitting them, according to their non-literal meanings. Accordingly, the report is to be interpreted with two [different forms of] interpretations. One of them is an interpretation by Malik ibn Anas and others, who said, 'It is His Mercy (*rahmah*), His Order (*amr*) and His angels who descend, as it can be said: "the Sultan did so and so" when actually [the task] has been performed by those under his command [and not by him personally] (...).'[43]

This quote is emblematic of the attitude of the *Salaf* regarding the verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God, as described by classical Sunni scholars. All the other scholars in this section divide the understanding of these texts into two main methods, one specific to the *Salaf*, and one to the *Khalaf* (the scholars after the *Salaf*). Al-Nawawi makes the distinction between those early scholars who would mostly refrain from interpreting, and those who came later and who would interpret, as they felt that there was a need for it.

As explained by al-Nawawi, the method of most of the scholars of the *Salaf* consists of discarding the literal meaning of the ambiguous verses and *hadith* (this point will prove crucial later, as one of the main arguments of the Salafists is to say that the *Salaf* used to take the texts according to their literal meaning), but refraining from giving a detailed interpretation. For example, in *hadith al-nuzul*, this attitude would be summed up by saying, 'the action of *nuzul* has been attributed to God in this *hadith*. It is not in the sense that God would descend or move, as He is exempt from such things, but the particular meanings *nuzul* may have in

this *hadith* will not be discussed'. Al-Nawawi attributes this attitude to 'most of the *Salaf* and to some of the theologians (*mutakallimun*)' because in the next paragraph, he demonstrates that some scholars of the *Salaf* period did give detailed interpretation, and also because not all the later theologians favoured the idea of giving detailed interpretations.

The method of most of the scholars of the *Khalaf* and of some of the *Salaf* period is also to start by discarding the literal meaning, but to then go a little further by assigning precise meanings to these ambiguous texts. Here, al-Nawawi does not quote any scholar of the *Khalaf* but rather he quotes two prominent names from the *Salaf* period, Malik ibn Anas and al-Awza'i, as if to prove that the origins of this practice are to be found in this era. To give an example of this method of interpretation on this *hadith*, one could understand that it means 'God orders an angel, for example, to descend' and announce to Muslims that they will be forgiven if they are supplicating and praying, the same way that 'the sultan' may be the subject of the verb 'to do' in the sentence 'the sultan did this' because he is the one who orders people under his command to do certain things. Even though it is evident that the sultan did not physically do these actions (for example, build a new building), the action is attributed to him because he is the one who gave the order. Al-Nawawi does not condemn this second method, that is, detailed interpreting, in any of his books, and actually grants it more emphasis by quoting other interpretations for this *hadith* after the paragraph translated above. This statement of al-Nawawi has been taken verbatim by many later scholars, such as 'Ali al-Qari (d.1065 AH).

Ibn Khaldun (d.1406)
The historian Ibn Khaldun relates the history of the debate over the Attributes of God and how to understand them in his Muqaddima:

It is true that metaphorical interpretation of the attributes mentioned is contrary to the opinion of the Early Muslims [*Salaf*], who left the matter to God. However, the theologians were led to adopt it by the fact that a number of followers of the early Muslims, namely the innovators [*muhdithun*, synonym of *mubtadi'un*] and more recent Hanbalites, erred with regard to the significance of those attributes. They considered them to be confirmed attributes of God of which it is not known 'how they are'.

(...) These people do not realize that it comes under the subject of anthropomorphism for them to affirm the attribute of (...) [*istiwa*], because according to the [Arab] lexicographers, the word [*istiwa*] implies being firmly settled in a place, which is something corporeal [i.e., 'sitting'].

(...) Then they claim that (their opinion) is the opinion of the early Muslims [*Salaf*], who, in fact, held no such opinion. Their opinion [i.e., that of the *Salaf*] was the one established at the beginning, namely, to leave to God (the question of) what is meant by the (attributes), and not to say that one understands them.[44]

He then concludes:

These people have even extended these meanings that they had innovated to the literal meanings of '*wajh*', ''*aynan*', '*yadayn*', '*nuzul*', '*kalam*' with letters and sounds, giving to those words meanings more general than the corporeal ones, and they then [declare that they] free God from those corporeal meanings, process which is unheard of in the [Arabic] language. The first among them as well as the later ones, followed this course. The orthodox [*Ahlus-Sunnah*] theologians, Ashari and Hanafi, have contradicted and fought their beliefs.[45]

Here, Ibn Khaldun gives a short but precise account, where he shows that the apparent meaning of the verses was always rejected by the scholars. He sums up the issue by highlighting the fact that those who insist in adhering to the literal meanings of the ambiguous verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God, while at the same time claiming that they were not assigning corporeal meanings to God, was 'unheard of in the Arabic language'. One can note that, in his view, orthodoxy is detailed in the work of *Ash'ari* and *Hanafi* theologians.[46]

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d.1449)

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani has given interpretations of numerous *hadith* in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*.[47] In some places where al-Bukhari quotes ambiguous verses from the Qur'an, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani comments, mentioning past scholars:

> Al-Bayhaqi said [about the verse *ilayhi yas'adu al-kalim al-tayyib* [Q 35:10] which literally means: The goodly word ascends to Allah], that the phrase 'the ascension of the goodly word and of the good charitable act' was an expression to mark the acceptance [by Allah, of those words and charitable acts]. [This phrase also indicates] that [these words and acts are elevated] to the place of residence of the angels, which is the sky. As for the phrase *ila Allah* [literally: to God], [it should be understood] as the *Salaf* mentioned before us in terms of *tafwid* (leaving the meaning to God) and as the imams after them [explained] in terms of *ta'wil* (interpretation). Ibn Battal[48] stated that al-Bukhari's objective in this chapter was to refute the Jahmi anthropomorphists for they stick to the apparent meanings [of the ambiguous verses and hadith dealing with the Attributes of God]. [For this reason] he [al-Bukhari] affirms that God is not a body and that He does need a place to establish Himself in, as He existed and there was no place.[49]

In this instance, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani makes an explicit reference to the two methods of interpretation: leaving the meaning to God, favoured by the scholars of the *Salaf*, and making a detailed interpretation, which has been performed by scholars who came after the *Salaf*. Ibn Hajar narrates the interpretation made by al-Bayhaqi according to which 'ascending to the sky' means 'to be accepted by Allah'.

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d.1567)

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami gives the following presentation, after commenting on the issue of the ambiguous verses:

> After that, one can choose, if ones wishes, to interpret [these verses and *hadith*] according to what we have already mentioned, and this is the path of the *Khalaf*, and they have chosen it because of the emergence and multiplication of the innovators who were attributing [to God] a direction and having bodily attributes (*al-jismiyya*) and other than that among what is impossible to attribute to God. If one wishes, one leaves the meaning [of those verses and *hadith*] to God, and this is the way of the *Salaf*, and they chose this way because there was not, in their times, what happened [later] in terms of horrendous misguidance and disgusting innovation, so there was no need for them to delve into this. And know that al-Qurafi and other than him have narrated from al-Shafi'i, Malik, Ahmad [ibn Hanbal] and Abu Hanifa, may God have mercy upon them, that they were declaring unbelievers those who would attribute [to God] the direction and were talking about anthropomorphism, and they were right in doing so.[50]

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami gives an explanation which is similar to the text quoted earlier from 'Ali al-Qari, that is, he explains that the only reason for subsequent scholars to delve into detailed

interpretation is their impression that people around them had less understanding than before, and the emergence of factions which were using these loopholes to introduce a different creed. When he mentions that one can 'choose', it also indicates that both methods are considered sound, a point which is also rejected by the Salafists.

al-Qari (d.1605)

When he came to comment on *hadith al-Nuzul*, 'Ali al-Qari states, after repeating word for word al-Nawawi's summary quoted above:

From the sayings of Shaykh al-Rabbani Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi, Imam al-Haramayn, al-Ghazali and other than them among our imams, it is known that both methods agree on leaving out the apparent meanings, like for the [terms] *maji, sura, shakhs, rijl, qadam, yad, wajh, ghadab, rahma, istiwa 'ala l-'arsh, al-kaoun fi l-sama*, [literally: coming, image, person, leg, foot, hand, face, anger, mercy, being established over the Throne, being in the Sky] and other than that among all the expressions which, if taken literally, lead to things which are considered unbelief (*kufr*) by consensus (*ijma'*) (. . .) The whole of the *Salaf* and of the *Khalaf* have agreed upon leaving out the literal meanings but they diverged over [this issue]: do we simply leave the literal meaning, believing in the fact that God is attributed with what befits His Greatness and Perfection, without making any other interpretation (*ta'wil*)? And this is the way of most of the *Salaf*, which is a '*ta'wil ijmali*' (a general interpretation); or do we interpret with something else, which is the way of most of the *khalaf*, and which is a detailed interpretation (*ta'wil tafsili*)? They (i.e., the *khalaf*) were not aiming at contradicting the Pious Predecessors by doing so, may God protect us from supposing such a thing from them! However, they were compelled by a necessity in

their times with the multiplicity of anthropomorphists, of *Jahmis* and other than these two groups among the deviated groups, and their control over the minds of the masses. They meant, by this [i.e., by their detailed interpretations] to answer their heresies, but many of them also warned: 'Had we been upon what the Pious Predecessors were upon in terms of purity of the beliefs and the non-existence of heresies of their times, we would not have delved into the interpretation of anything (. . .)'.

I have learned that Malik and al-Awza'i, who were both among the greatest [scholars] of the *Salaf* have interpreted [some] *hadith* in detail and so did Sufyan al-Thawri, who interpreted the '*istiwa 'ala l-'arsh*' as His Order (. . .) Some of the *salaf* and of the *khalaf* said that the one who believes in a direction [for Allah] is a non-Muslim, as has been narrated by al-'Iraqi, who said that this was the opinion of Abu Hanifa, of Malik, of a Shafi'i, of al-Ash'ari and of al-Baqillani.[51]

Here, 'Ali al-Qari provides an explanation for the recourse to interpretation made by some of the later scholars. He defends the position of the *Khalaf*, who interpreted more frequently than the scholars of the *Salaf* used to. This was not because these later scholars thought they knew better than the previous scholars, but rather because the societies they lived in differed from that of the scholars of the *Salaf*. Therefore, resorting to interpretation should only be seen as a way to protect the masses against wrong beliefs that might fall into their minds due to their ignorance of the Arabic language or of certain rules pertaining to the religion.

al-Bayadi (d.1686)

In his book dedicated to explaining religious statements made by Abu Hanifa, Kamal al-Din Ahmad al-Bayadi chooses a sentence from *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* and then comments on it. The original sentence is:

la yusafu Allahu bi-sifat al-makhluqin wa la yuqal inna yaduhu qudratuhu aw ni'matuhu li anna fihi ibtal al-sifat wa huwa qawl ahl al-qadr wa l-'itizal wa lakin yaduhu sifatuhu bila kayf [meaning: God is not to be attributed with attributes of the creations, and it should not be said that His *yad* is His *qudra* (i.e., that *yad* would mean power) or that it would be His ni'ma (i.e., that yad would mean His Grace), because this entails a nullification of the attributes and this is the saying of the Mu'tazila and the Qadariyya. However, His *yad* is His attribute without a 'how'].

Al-Bayadi explains that this statement indicates four things:

The first one is: the obligation to make a general interpretation (*ta'wil ijmali*) away from the apparent meanings which come to the mind. That is indicated when he says that God is not to be described with attributes of the creations which necessitate an interpretation.

The second one is: the prohibition of a detailed interpretation (*ta'wil tafsili*) which entails to understand it as power or grace or the like. That is indicated when he says that it should not be said that His *yad* is His power or His grace as it contains a nullification of the confirmed attribute and is not a synonym of this attribute.

The third one is: the refutation of those who specified the meaning willed [by God] among the metaphors (*majazat*) and who went too far into detailed interpretations. That is indicated when he says that this is the saying of the *Qadariyya* and the *Mu'tazila*.

The fourth one is: to leave the meaning to God (*tafwid*) in terms of specification, after having taking into account the metaphorical meaning in general, and this is indicated by his saying that the attribute *yad* is His attribute without a how,

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which means that the attribute is not the literal meaning of *yad* at all (*laysat ma'na haqiqiyan lil-yad qat'an*).[52]

He then sums up the two positions:

> What the *Salaf* was doing was: interpreting generally and leaving (*tafwid*) the detailed meaning of the ambiguous verses [to God]. It appears that the way of the *Salaf* is safer, and the way of the *khalaf* is more precise, and none of them is to be opposed to the other one in an absolute way.[53]

Here, too, one can see that at the very beginning of the century into which Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was born, there were similar accounts of the position of the *Salaf* and of the *Khalaf* concerning those verses. This quote is even more interesting when one knows that the original sentence by Abu Hanifa that al-Bayadi comments on is frequently used nowadays by Salafists to justify and prove that interpretation in general is forbidden. Conversely, prominent *Hanafi* scholars like al-Bayadi did not understand this sentence to mean a prohibition of all interpretations but only of detailed interpretation, and he still considers that Abu Hanifa, by discarding the literal meaning, made a general interpretation.

al-Murtada al-Zabidi (d.1791)

Al-Murtada al-Zabidi was a specialist in lexicography, famous for having written *Taj al-'arus*, a commentary of the *Qamus*, an ancient Arabic dictionary. His commentary of the *Ihya* spans over 14 volumes. He was a contemporary of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, although it is unclear if he had personal knowledge of the teachings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. He says, while commenting on al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, where al-Ghazali mentions the verse attributing *istawa* (literally: being established or sitting) to God:

[This is] according to what befits Him and He is, exalted be He, more knowledgeable about it. This is what the *Salaf* did with the ambiguous [verses] in terms of exempting God from what does not befit His Majesty *ta'ala*, while leaving the knowledge of its meaning to God (*ma'a tafwid ma'nahu ilayhi*), and not like some people said among those who allow for God that He would be sitting on the Throne the way a king is on his bed, over something.[54]

It is not clear whether al-Zabidi is referring to some of his contemporaries or refuting general ideas. In any case, it demonstrates that renowned scholars like him did hold a traditional view regarding the position of the *Salaf*, that is, that they were 'leaving the meaning to God' and not taking the literal meanings (here: being established and being seated) of the ambiguous verses. All the other authors in this section clearly wrote in defence of Ash'ari because they felt threatened by the rise and the expansion of Wahhabi concepts in the definition of the Muslim creed.

The definition of the position of the scholars of the *Salaf* was largely accepted by Muslim scholars. The consensus they reached was that the scholars of the *Salaf* period were against taking the literal meaning of the ambiguous verses, but would not necessarily specify a given meaning, although they might on occasion. This included members of any of the four main schools of Law, *Sufis* and *Ash'aris* or *Maturidis*. This definition had been the norm since the twelfth century. It was contested by those who took inspiration from personalities who were mostly affiliated with the *Hanbali madhhab*.[55] Their books present a different type of discourse regarding the orthodox belief in God and the attitude of the Salaf about the Attributes of God.

Perceptions of opponents to the consensus

The consensus highlighted above did receive a challenge posed by personalities affiliated to the *Hanbali* school. These challenges

were smaller in scope with comparison to the number of scholars who wrote in favour of the consensus position. However, their arguments are the origin of the arguments developed nowadays by modern factions. For this reason, studying them offers a unique perspective on the sources of some current debates.

Additional information on excerpts

This is a presentation of the sources of excerpts used in this chapter and their authors, in chronological order of the authors' dates of death:

— *Ibtal al-ta'wilat* by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn Ibn al-Farra, also known as al-Qadi Abu Ya'la (d.1066). Abu Ya'la is one of the three named individuals of *Hanbali* background that Ibn al-Jawzi heavily criticised in his work *Daf' shubah al-tashbih*.[56] Merlin Swartz, the editor, translator and commentator of Ibn al-Jawzi's main work, believes that *Ibtal al-Ta'wilat* has disappeared, apart from a few fragments quoted by different authors,[57] notably Abu Ya'la's grandson in his *Tabaqat al-Hanabila*.[58] However, I have located an edition of this book, in two volumes, from Saudi Arabia.[59] There is some evidence that Ibn al-Jawzi was not the only one to have criticised Abu Ya'la for the same accusations of anthropomorphism, as can be seen in *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*.[60]

— *al-Idah fi usul al-din* by Ibn al-Zaghuni (d.1133), a notable Baghdadi cleric attached to the *Hanbali* school.[61] Swartz mentions that nothing has remained from his written works[62] but I have found out that since Swartz's publication in 2002, there have been two different editions of *al-Idah*, one in two volumes, published in 2003,[63] and one in a single volume, published in 2004.[64] I have had access to both, and I will use the one published in 2004.[65]

— *Tahrim al-Nadhar fi kutub ahl al-kalam* by Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama (d.1223), a jurisconsult who specialised in *Hanbali* school judgements. This book has been translated into English as

censure of speculative theology. His books on *Hanbali* law, such as *al-Mughni* and *al-Umda*, have been considered classical works of reference for the school.

— *Majmu'a fatawa*[66] which is a collection of the major works of the renowned figure Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), as well as his books entitled *Minhaj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*,[67] *al-Fatawa al-Kubra*[68] and *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyya*.[69] Ibn Taymiyya, who had reached the level of traditionist of *hadith*, as well as of *ijtihad*, according to his supporters, was put in prison during his lifetime for diverse allegations, including anthropomorphism. He became a major inspiration for Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d.1792), as will be expanded in Chapter 3.

— *Ithbat al-yad lillah subhanahu sifat min sifatihi*[70] by al-Dhahabi (d.1348 CE), a Syrian historian and theologian, one of the most famous students of Ibn Taymiyya.[71] Al-Dhahabi wrote it to confirm a so-called real hand to God. He criticises all manner of interpretations given to the word *yad* other than the literal meaning. Al-Dhahabi is known to have followed Ibn Taymiyya's methodology in his understanding of the Attributes of God.

This section will also include excerpts of statements by the theologian and exegete Abu Nasr al-Qushayri (d.1120), quoted earlier, to help understand the terms of the debate between the *Ash'aris* and those that they accused of anthropomorphism in Baghdad. Excerpts from *Kitab akhbar al-sifat*[72] and *Daf' shubah al-tashbih*[73] by Ibn al-Jawzi[74] allow us to comprehend how he understood what the doctrinal problem of his fellow *Hanbalis* was, especially as it appears that the works of at least one person he was accusing of anthropomorphism are not available: those of Ibn Hamid (d.1012), who was also from the *Hanbali* tradition. I have not been able to locate Ibn Hamid's main book on theological issues: *Sharh usul al-din*, and Merlin Swartz is of the view that none of his books have survived, except for one 'small catechism'.[75]

Abu Ya'la (d.1066)

Abu Ya'la, also called simply *al-Qadi* in *Hanbali* literature as he occupied this position for the *Hanbali* school in Baghdad, was of the view that the *Salaf* understood the verses literally. He explains:

> It is not permissible to take those *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayra by taking the confirmation of it literally, because God did describe Himself in His book and elsewhere without any fabrication, and His Prophet did the same in *sahih* [*hadith*]. The Predecessors (*salaf*) of this community did confirm what we are clarifying (. . .)
>
> And know that it is not permissible to reject those *hadith* as what a group of *mu'tazila* did, and that it is not permissible to busy oneself with the interpretation of those texts, as what the *Asharis* did. What is compulsory is to take them according to their apparent meaning, and indeed the attributes of God – exalted be He – are different from those among the creations who have been attributed by the [names of these] attributes, and we do no believe that they resemble them. Rather, [take them] according to what has been narrated from our shaykh and our imam Abu Abdullah Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal and others, who are among the imams of the *ashab al-hadith* (i.e., the imams of the best transmitters among them), they used to say, concerning those reports: we recite them as they came, and we take them according to the apparent meaning, in the sense that the attributes of God, exalted be He, do not resemble the attributes of others who are attributed with things.[76]

This rhetoric is exactly what was condemned as anthropomorphism by the scholars quoted earlier. As a glimpse into the consequences of saying 'We take them as they came, according to their literal meaning, and God does not resemble His creations', one can refer to what was said by Abu Nasr al-Qushayri, son of the famous Sufi

scholar al-Qushayri and well-known for having debated with the students of Abu Ya'la in Baghdad.

Abou Nasr al-Qushayri argues:

> Let the person who hears them say to them that these statements need further clarification. To say that these statements need to be taken literally and then to add that the meanings are not conceivable, is contradictory.
>
> If you take the literal meaning of the verse '*Yawma yukshafu an saq*' [literally: the day when a shin will be uncovered] then you are saying *saq* [literally: shin] means the organ which is composed of skin, flesh, nerves, bone and marrow, and by this you have attributed organs to Allah and this is blasphemy. And if you say 'I do not mean that', then how is it that you claim to adhere to the literal meanings?[77]

Although Abu Ya'la claims that he does not want to suggest that God resembles His creations, to Abu Nasr al-Qushayri, such literal interpretation of the verse is anthropomorphism. The literal meaning is what is commonly known about a term, what comes to the mind immediately when one utters the word, and this happens to be an organ or a direction, depending on the text.

Ibn al-Jawzi uses the same argument:

> Does the word *istawa*, when taken according to its apparent meaning, mean anything else than sitting (*qu'ud)* and does the word *nuzul* [literally: descending] mean anything else than movement (*intiqal*)?[78]

He adds:

> If [only] you had said: 'We recite them [without comment]', no one would have censured you. It is your interpretation of them in a literalistic fashion ('*ala dh-dhahir*) alone that is

objectionable. Refrain from insinuating into the doctrine of Ahmad, our pious ancestor, what he never taught! Instead you have brought shame and dishonour to the school, so much so that the only thing that is now said of a *Hanbali* is that he is an anthropomorphist (*mujassim*).[79]

Both writers argue that Abu Ya'la's ideas have been adopted by people who do not have the knowledge to understand their ramifications for the belief in God. They justify the harshness of their attack by expressing the danger of anthropomorphism which they perceive as taking a person out of the fold of Islam.

Abu Nasr al-Qushayri continues:

If it was not for their trying to misguide laymen Muslims with statements close to what they imagine and with rules which they might be deluded by because of insufficiency of knowledge, then I would not have stained my book by mentioning them. The truth is that this faction is more harmful to the Muslims than the Jews, the Christians and the idol-worshipers, because the misguidance of these non-Muslims is known and apparent to the Muslims and they avoid it. But this faction addresses the common Muslim in a way that might trick the people with weak knowledge. They conveyed these bad innovations to people who follow them. They misguided their followers to believe that Allah is attributed with organs and riding and descending from one place to another and lying down and sitting and being established in a place and going from one direction to another. So the one who accepts their claim that one should adhere to the apparent meanings of these ambiguous verses will imagine physical imaginings and attribute them to Allah, and thus fall into an abhorrent creed. And the flood will wash him away without him even realising it.[80]

As for Ibn al-Jawzi, he sums up:

> The truth of the matter is that they are steeped into anthropomorphism, and those who follow them are largely from the masses ('*awwam*).[81]

Now that the problem lying in the method of interpreting these verses literally has been clarified, we can describe the positions of those who encouraged such literalism. For example, Abu Ya'la suggested that God is attributed with 'the fist between the shoulders', based upon a contested *hadith* which he considers reliable and according to which the Prophet dreamed about God putting His 'fist' between the Prophet's shoulders. Abu Ya'la concludes that interpreting this text literally does not contradict the fact that it is not an organ:

> Know that there is not, in taking this report according to its literal meaning, what makes it impossible to be an attribute of God, and this is not outside the pale of what is true about God, because we confirm the fist the same way that we confirm the two hands, and the attribute of hearing, seeing and of the face, not in the meaning of organs and parts.[82]

His text contains many such explanations which take the opposite approach to the scholars we have quoted earlier. Although today's Salafists acknowledge that he was excessive in his use of unreliable *hadiths*, they do not explicitly condemn him for it.

Ibn al-Zaghuni (d.1133)

Ibn al-Zaghuni was inspired by Abu Ya'la's writings. In *al-Idah*, he quotes the *hadith* of the female slave, according to which the Prophet said to a female slave '*Ayna Allah*', which literally means 'Where is God?' This was interpreted by *Ash'ari* scholars to mean 'What importance/status, do you give to God?' To this question,

the female slave answered '*fis-sama*", which literally means 'in the sky'. This was interpreted by some *Ash'ari* scholars to mean a very high status/a great importance, that is, 'I worship Him'.[83] After hearing this, the Prophet ordered that she be freed, as her faith in Islam had been proven. Ibn al-Zaghuni then discusses the meaning of this *hadith*:

> The proof that it is permissible to ask 'where' [about God] is that the Prophet asked ''*ayn Allah*', and she answered that He is '*fi s-sama*'. And this is a good proof, and a clear text from among what has been narrated. As for the verses that have reached us they are [quoted] above [earlier in the book]. Therefore they prove the confirmation of a place 'al – ayniyyah' according to what is apparent [from those texts] (. . .) so we do not repeat them for fear of making [the book] longer, and because we set out to give a summary.[84]

His book *al-Idah* also contains a chapter[85] dedicated to demonstrating his view upon the soundness of understanding the verses according to their apparent meaning. It is presented as a polemical discussion with injunctions such as 'They argued, we answered . . .' (*qalu/qulna*). Throughout the chapter, Ibn al-Zaghuni quotes the scholars of the *Salaf*, especially Ahmad ibn Hanbal, as supposedly having the same creed as his, making it clear that he believes to have taken the position of the *Salaf*.

Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328)

The individual whose ideas have been most influential in this field is, without a doubt, Ibn Taymiyya. He is the one whose arguments are constantly reused today to defend the theory that the *Salaf* never interpreted any *hadith* or Qur'anic verse, and that they took the ambiguous verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God according to the literal meaning. He was preceded in his stance by Ibn Qudama (d.1223), censor of the *Ash'aris*, also at the

head of *Hanbali* teaching at his time. Ibn Taymiyya claimed, in *Majmu'a fatawa*:

> I have not found to this time, that any companion interpreted anything from a verse concerning the attributes or a *hadith* in contradiction with its situation known and understood.[86]

In his al-*Fatawa al-hamawiyya al-kubra* he added:

> It is impossible that the Prophet omitted [anything] from the subject of the Faith in God (. . .) and did not clarify what was compulsory [to know] about God, His Sublime Names and His Perfect Attributes, or about what is permissible [to believe] about God and what is impossible [to believe] about Him, for this knowledge is the foundation of the religion, the basics of guidance, the best and the most obligatory [issue] on which hearts will be taken to account [on the Day of Judgement] (. . .)
>
> It is impossible that [the scholars of] the first best centuries, i.e., [those of] the century in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, received the revelation, then those who follow, and those who follow, did not know or did not talk about what the truth is concerning this matter, because the opposite of that can only be either that they did not know and did not speak about it, or that they believed in the contrary of the truth and they spoke contrarily to what they believed in, and both are impossible.[87]

In this quote, Ibn Taymiyya is of the view that none of the scholars of the *Salaf* ever interpreted, and in addition, if they didn't, then there should be no need for anybody else to do so either. The same argument was given by Ibn Qudama in his book against *Ash'aris*m:

If he [the *Ashari* opponent] should say, 'You have abstained from the interpretation of the Koranic verses and the traditions which have come down to us with regard to the divine attributes', claiming that the ancestors did interpret them and explain them, then he is uttering falsehood, forging lies, and is guilty of the most grievous aberration. For there is no question about the fact that the doctrine of the Ancestors, in this regard, consisted in acknowledgement, unreserved approval, and avoidance of the temerity of using allegorical interpretation and *tamthil* (anthropomorphism). Moreover, the fundamental rule is to presume the lack of their use of allegorical interpretation. So let him who claims that they did interpret them allegorically produce evidence in support of his statement. But there is no way of knowing this, save by the transmission and relation of traditions. Let him then transmit to us traditions to this effect on the authority of the apostle of God or that of his Companions, or on the authority of one of the Successors or one of the approved Imams. Furthermore, he who claims this is one of the partisans of speculative theology; and they are the most ignorant of men with regard to the traditions of the Companions, the least possessed of knowledge with regard to those of the Successors, and the most neglectful of their transmission. Whence then would they have knowledge of traditions such as these? Even so, should anyone among them transmit something, his transmission would not be accepted, nor would he be heeded. The sole possessions of these people consist on forgery, falsehood and false witness.[88]

This argument used by al-Qudama and later by Ibn Taymiyya, according to which if the Prophet and his companions did not give detailed interpretation then others should not either, has been used since the time of al-Ash'ari, as can be seen in his pamphlet

justifying the use of reason in religious matters, *Risalat stihsan al-khawd fi 'ilm al-kalam*:

> A certain group of men have made ignorance their capital. Finding reasoning and inquiry into religious belief too burdensome, they incline towards the easy way of servile sectarianism. They calumniate he who scrutinizes the basic dogmas of religion and accuse him of deviation. It is innovation and deviation, they claim, to engage in *kalam* [theological speculation] about motion and rest, body and accident, accidental modes and states, the atom and the leap, and the attributes of the Creator.
>
> They assert that if it were a matter of guidance and rectitude, the Prophet and his Caliphs and his Companions would have discussed it. For, they say, the Prophet did not die until he had discussed and amply explained all needful religious matters. He left nothing to be said by anyone about the affairs of their religion needful to Muslims (. . .)
>
> Since no *kalam* on any of the subjects which we have mentioned has been related from the Prophet, we know that such *kalam* is an innovation and such inquiry a deviation. For if it were good, the Prophet and his Companions would not have failed to discuss it. For the absence of such *kalam* on the part of the Prophet and his Companions can be explained in only two ways: either they knew it and were silent about it; or they did not know it, nay, were ignorant of it. Now, if they knew it and did not discuss it, then we also may be silent about it, as they were, and we may abstain from plunging into it, as they abstained. For if it were a part of religion, they could not have been silent about it. On the other hand, if they did not know it, then we may have the same ignorance of it. So, according to both explanations, such *kalam* is an innovation and plunging into it is a deviation. This is the summary of their argument for

abstaining from reasoning about the basic dogmas of religion.[89]

Here, al-Ash'ari shows that he has understood the argument of his opponents. One of his answers to this was:

Moreover, why have you not refused to answer him who says that the Qur'an is created? And why have you accused him of unbelief? There is no sound tradition from the Prophet on denying its creation and accusing of unbelief he who says that it is created. They may say: Because Ahmad b. Hanbal denied that it is created and held that he who says it is created should be accused of unbelief. One should say to them: And why did not Ahmad keep silent about that instead of discussing it? They may say: Because Abbas al-Anbari, and Waki', and 'Abd al-Rahman b. Mahdi, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, said that the Qur'an is uncreated and that he who says that it is created is an unbeliever. One should say to them: and why did they not keep silent about what Muhammad had not discussed? They may say: Because 'Amr b.Dinar, and Sufyan b. Uyaina, and Ja'far b. Muhammad, and so-and-so, said it is neither creating nor created. One should say to them: And why did they not refrain from saying this, since the Apostle of God did not say it?

And if they refer back to the Companions, this is sheer obstinacy. For one may say to them: And why did they not refrain from saying that, since the Prophet did not discuss it, and did not say: 'Call him who says it an unbeliever'. They may say: The Ulama simply must engage in *kalam* on a new question, so that the ignorant may know how to judge the matter. One should say: This is the admission which we wanted you to make! Why, then, do you hinder (men from engaging in) *kalam*? You use it yourselves when you want to; but when you are silenced (in a discussion), you say: We are

forbidden to engage in *kalam*. And when you want to, you blindly and unquestioningly follow your predecessors, without argument or explanation. This is wilfulness and capriciousness!

Then one should say to them: The Prophet did not discuss vows and testamentary injunctions, or manumission, or the manner of reckoning the uninterrupted transmission of estates, nor did he compose a book about those things, as did Malik, and al-Thawri, and al-Shafi'I, and Abu Hanifa. Hence, you are forced to admit they are were deviating innovators, since they did what the Prophet had not done, and said what he had not said explicitly, and composed what the Prophet had not composed, and said that those who maintain that the Qur'an is created are to be called unbelievers, though the Prophet did not say that. What he has said contains enough to satisfy any intelligent man who is not perversely stubborn.[90]

Al-Ash'ari tries to prove that his opponents accepted some other concepts introduced into the religion and for which there is no explicit text like a verse or a *hadith*, such as the blasphemous nature of claiming that the Qur'an was created. The argument of the declaration of unbelief of the one who says that the Qur'an is created is effective here because both al-Ash'ari and his opponents agreed that it was unbelief to profess that the Qur'an is created, in spite of the fact that this was not something said or professed by the Prophet. He states that the problem with this theory of Ibn Qudama and Ibn Taymiyya is: what authority should be granted to the reports that some scholars from the *Salaf* did interpret some verses and *hadith*? Even if one accepted that they were all forgeries, these reports have been widely accepted by Muslim scholars throughout history and were frequently quoted. This would mean that all these scholars had somehow been duped or were mistaken on an issue no less important than the Essence of God.

Ibn Taymiyya also abhorred the division of the acceptable methods of interpretation into two: that of the *Salaf*, and that of the *Khalaf*, as explained by al-Nawawi and others. According to this division, 'the way of the *Salaf* was safer, and the way of the *Khalaf* was more precise', but Ibn Taymiyya considers that this statement attributes misguidance to the scholars of the *Salaf*, as if the scholars who came after those of the *Salaf* could possibly have more knowledge than those who were closest to the Prophet:

> They [the later *Ash'aris*] also say: 'The *Madhhab* of the *Salaf* is that those verses and *hadith* narrated about the attributes are not to be interpreted, and the theologians consider their interpretation either compulsory or possible' and then they quote the difference between the *Salaf* and the [*Ash'ari*] theologians. This is all over in their tongues and in their books.[91] Can the one with sound mind consider this?
>
> Isn't it clear that it means that the *Salaf* were misguided about *tawhid*, about the fact that God does not resemble the Creation and about the knowledge of those who came after? This has to be a corruption of the real knowledge and the clear religion.[92]

Ibn Taymiyya criticises the fact that the later *Ash'ari* scholars had already distinguished their views from that of the *Salaf* by saying that there are two correct ways of understanding the Attributes of God as mentioned in ambiguous verses from the Qur'an and in *hadith*:

> And some of them will consider their recent brothers better and more knowledgeable that the *Salaf*, they would say: the way of the *Salaf* is safer, and the way of [the *Khalaf*] is more knowledgeable and accurate, so they describe themselves as being better, in the science of proving, verifying and in knowledge [than the *salaf*], and they consider the *Salaf* as

inadequate, with the fact that they failed in this regard, or that they made mistakes or were ignorant.[93]

He adds:

> There is no doubt that this is an [implicit] non acceptance (*rafd*) [of the *Salaf*] because even though they [the later *Ash'aris*] are not declaring the *Salaf* as unbelievers, like the *Rafida* and the *Khawarij*, this is still like what the *Mu'tazila*, the *Zaydiyya* and others declare, that they [i.e., the *Salaf*] were ignorant, prone to error and misguided.[94]

This is a very strong criticism, and it can be compared to what Ibn Taymiyya said towards the end of his life about the way the *Ash'ari* scholars were interpreting. At the end of the month of Ramadan 1326, two emissaries came to see him and asked him to accept this statement:

> What we want from him is that he believes in the negation of a direction for God and of a limit to Him, and that he would not say that the attribute of *Kalam* [literally: Speech] of Allah is made of letter and voice which would be settled in Him, but that this is a meaning settled in Him, that God is not pointed to with the fingers in the manner of the senses, and we ask from him [i.e., Ibn Taymiyya] that he does not confuse the masses with the *hadith* and verses pertaining to the Attributes of God, and that he does not discuss [this issue] in letters to be sent to different countries, and also not in dealing with this issue.[95]

Ibn Taymiyya then describes this event as a *mihna* (an ordeal).[96] He considers that what the two emissaries required from him was no less than 'a change of the religion, and [. . .] following other than the path of the Muslims',[97] and that the declaration in itself

was among the 'innovated sayings' which contained the same misguidance that the *Jahmi* theologians brought with them. He says:

> [I was ordered with] 'hypocrisy (*nifaq*), innovation (…), misguidance. [I was ordered to] obey the saints (*awliya*) as opposed to God. [I was ordered to] follow what the Devil came with. This is one of the greatest [cases of] replacement of the religion of the Merciful with the religion of the Devil and to seek helpers other than Allah.[98]

His argument consists of saying that he does not confirm a voice or a direction to God, not because He is not attributed with them, but because there is no text either confirming or denying any of those things about God from the Qur'an, from the *hadith* and from the *Salaf*, and that declaring that God is attributed with a voice or a direction, or professing that He is not would be an innovation in both cases. He has used this argument in different occasions in his works, like in his *Mufassal al-i'tiqad*:

> As for the word *tajsim*, it is not found in the sayings of anyone from the *Salaf*, either to confirm it or to reject it, so how would it be possible to say 'the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is to reject *tajsim* or to confirm it?'[99]

In *Bayan talbis al-Jahmiyya*, he affirms:

> It is not in the Book of God, nor in the *Sunna* of His Prophet, nor in the sayings of anyone from the *Salaf* of the community or its scholars, that God is not a body, and that His Attributes are neither bodies nor accidents, and therefore to reject meanings confirmed by the Book and the *Sunna* to negate words whose meanings cannot be found in the Book or the mind is ignorance and deviation.[100]

In his *Kitab minhaj al-sunna al-Nabawiyya*, he asserts:

> If we say that God moves and that He has in Him things which have a beginning and accidents (*taqum bihi al-hawadith wa l-a'rad*), what is the proof of the incorrectness of what we say?[101]

Finally, Ibn Taymiyya shows that he is clearly against understanding some of the texts according to a meaning which is not the literal meaning:

> God did attribute Himself with an *istawa* (literally: being established) over the Throne and it is obligatory to use this attribute without exegesis (*tafsir*), without interpretation (*ta'wil*), and not with the meaning of elevation in status or in degree, and not in the meaning of dominating or of knowledge. Ahmad [ibn Hanbal] said, according to the narration of [his son] Hanbal: 'We believe that God is over the Throne as He wishes the way He wishes without a limit or an attribute that reaches Him, and no one can limit Him.'[102]

The position of Ibn Taymiyya is therefore clearly anti-*Ash'ari* and anti-interpretation. His arguments are those mainly used today by holders of this position.

al-Dhahabi (d.1348)

One of Ibn Taymiyya's students, al-Dhahabi was also of the view that the *Salaf* used to take ambiguous verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God according to their apparent meanings:

> 'Al-Hafiz Abu al-Qasim Isma'il ibn al-Fadl al-Asbahani said: 'About what has reached us about the attributes in the Book and in what has been narrated with reliable chains of

transmission, the way of the *Salaf* [regarding those texts] is to take them according to **their apparent meaning and to negate the manner of them**' [emphasis mine].[103]

This is, again, the opposite of what the Sunni scholars quoted ealier said. Here, al-Dhahabi affirms that the *Salaf* used to take the 'apparent meaning' of these texts, while Sunnis say that they interpret at least generally, by saying that the literal meaning was not the intended meaning. The emphasis was added in order to demonstrate how easy it is to confuse this statement with those above, but it is very obvious to the one who knows what to look for, which side of the debate adh-Dhahabi was on.

Similar quotes could be retrieved from Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya's works (another of Ibn Taymiyya's famous and influential students) and other *Hanbali*-affiliated preachers contemporaneous to Ibn Taymiyya and his students. However, after the generation of his students, sources become scarce regarding any contestation of the position of the *Salaf.* Ibn Taymiyya's legacy in the field of theology and on the issue of whether or not the *Salaf* did allow interpretation of the ambiguous verses and *hadith* dealing with the Attributes of God seems to have been relatively confined to a certain Damascene sphere of acquaintances who helped spread and preserve his writings, but who did not manage to spread their ideas into the whole of the Muslim world. This gap of a few centuries between the generation of his students and the generation of the students of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is significant. This gap is the main reason why today's Salafists have a vision of Islamic history which does not include the period between Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab as a period worthy of consideration. In Chapter 4, we shall see how the classical positions have been updated in modern times, but before looking at the impact of Wahhabism on this debate, we shall introduce Wahhabism as a movement and as an ideological power.

CHAPTER 3

WAHHABISM: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Wahhabism: a short history

Wahhabism is the name given to the movement founded by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. He was born in 1703 in 'Uyayna, a village in the province of Najd, in central Arabia. He was born in a family of learned people, the Al Musharraf. His grandfather was a judge and so was his father, 'Abd al-Wahhab. In 1715, he left his home for an enterprise of seeking religious knowledge. This was relatively normal at the time, considering his family background and the fact that Najd had limited resources both in terms of teachers and books, especially when compared with al-Hijaz, for example, the region where Mecca and Medina are. The exact sequence of his peregrinations is difficult to establish, due to lack of sources. However, it is agreed that he visited Mecca, Medina, al-Ahsa (a city in Eastern Arabia) and Basra, in southern Iraq. It is believed that he first performed a hajj in Mecca and that from there he went to Medina. There, he was taught notably by Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi (d.1750), an Indian preacher who introduced him to *hadith* tradition, and 'Abdullah ibn Sayf al-Shammari, who commented on the writings of Ibn Taymiya

(d.1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.1350) for him. They also inspired him to refer to the two main sources of Islamic law directly, that is, the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, as opposed to relying heavily on commentaries made throughout the centuries.[1] John Voll explains that 'the *Haramayn* cosmopolitan scholarly tradition may not have been the cause of eighteenth-century Islamic revivalism, but it had connections with most such movements'.[2]

During his travels, especially in Basra, a port city with a sizeable Shi'i community at the time, he was confronted by popular Islamic piety in the form of prayers and visits to the graves of locally renowned, pious men, practices which he disliked and condemned. He met an important Islamic studies teacher, named Muhammad al-Majmu'i, who extended his knowledge of the *Hanbali* tradition and who initially endorsed his calls to rectify what he perceived as wrong in that community. The local religious elite, however, put pressure on the authorities to have him leave Basra due to his activism. He then went to al-Ahsa, where he was disappointed by the teachings and by the lack of commitment of the local scholars. He took some time there to copy many of the books of Ibn Taymiya and of Ibn al-Qayyim, who became major sources of inspiration for him.

It was then, in around 1739, that he went back to the oasis of Huraymila, in his native region of Najd where his father was a judge. There, he wrote his most famous book, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, or the Book on the Oneness of God.

By then, the main elements of his theology had already been shaped. His personal conviction was that the Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula had neglected the quintessence of Islam, which is the belief in the Oneness of God (in Arabic: *tawhid*). He understood some of the practices of his contemporaries to be in violation of what worshipping one God entails.

His original writings describe three types of oneness: the oneness of Allah's Lordship (*tawhid al-rububiyyah*), which consists of recognising and knowing that there is only one God; the

oneness of Allah's worship (*tawhid al-uluhiyyah*), which consists of dedicating all acts of worship to God; the oneness of Allah's Attributes (*tawhid al-sifat* in his original writings, which then became *tawhid al-Asma wa al-Sifat* in later Wahhabi literature, i.e., the oneness of Allah's names and attributes), which he defines as stemming from the other two types of oneness and consisting in confirming the attributes of God.[3]

He found inspiration for this definition in what Ibn Taymiya had said before him.[4] He considered that idol worshippers could be counted as honouring partially the requirements of the oneness of God, and that some of them even had more belief in the oneness of God than some of his Muslim contemporaries. For example, he would explain that all idol worshippers would agree that God had Lordship over everything, using the verse in the Qur'an, which means 'And if you were to ask them: "Who has created the heavens and the earth," they would surely answer "God"' [Q 39:38]. For Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, this proves that idol worshippers fulfil the requirements of the oneness of God's Lordship, but that by worshipping other than God they do not uphold the requirements of the oneness of Allah's worship. He then proceeds to explain that Muslims who ask for the intercession of Prophets or pious people have a weaker belief in the oneness of God than the polytheists, as he said that polytheists, in their hours of need, would turn to God, whereas some Muslims would ask for the help of other than God. This has led him to say that their disbelief, as he saw it, was even worse than the disbelief of the idol worshippers.[5] To consider that non-Muslims could have a stronger belief in the oneness of God than Muslims was revolutionary and caused him to face strong opposition to his teachings later on. At the origin of his understanding of the concept of oneness, is his definition of the Islamic testification of faith (*shahadatayn*). He explains that when the Prophet was asking the idol worshippers to say 'There is no god except God', he did not mean by 'God' the Creator, or the Sustainer, as he believes they

knew that already, but that he meant Allah is the only one who can be sought for the sake of one's affairs.[6] Hence, he considered calling upon any other than Allah a type of *shirk*, even if not with the purpose of worshipping. This is where many of his opponents disagreed, arguing that there were several religious narrations indicating, for example, that on the Day of Judgement, people will call upon the Prophets to help them, or that this definition was never mentioned by linguists or religious scholars of the past. Nevertheless, it is this understanding which has motivated Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab to call people to what he considered the true oneness of God. Delong-Bas, who authored a controversial[7] biography of the founder of Wahhabism, describes his fundamental teachings as such:

> His adamant belief that *tawhid* should be at the center of Muslim life led Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to dedicate his life to preaching and teaching the necessity of worshipping the one and only God and the elaboration of how this was to be done in practice.[8]

He attempted to start to preach his message in the oasis of Huraymila but had to considerably restrict his ambitions in view of the opposition marked by his father. In a biographical dictionary of *Hanbali* scholars from 1349 to 1874, which contains over 800 entries, the author, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Humayd, who was the Mufti of the *Hanbalis* of Mecca, mentions this disagreement between father and son in the note on Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's father:

> 'Abd al-Wahhab Ibn Sulayman ibn 'Ali ibn Musharraf al-Tamimi al-Najdi (. . .) He is the father of Muhammad, who was founder of the mission {i.e., the Wahhabi mission} whose evil has spread across the horizon. However, there is an enormous difference between father and son. Indeed,

Muhammad did not reveal his mission until after the death of his father. Some of the people whom I met have related from some of the people of knowledge narrations from the contemporaries of Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab that describe his anger against his son Muhammad. This is because he had not agreed to study of the religious knowledge of his ancestors and the people of his area. His father had a presentiment that something would happen because of him, and so frequently said to the people 'How much evil you are going to see from Muhammad.' Subsequently, what Allah destined to happen came to pass.[9]

In 1740, his father died, and he went back to al-'Uyayna, where he started to spread his teachings. He presented them as a purification of the creed of Islam. The ruler of al-'Uyayna, Uthman al-Mu'ammar, initially supported him, but had him expelled due to pressure by locals who found his style and teachings too radical. He then moved to al-Dir'iyya, still in the region on al-Najd, concluding a pact with the ruler of the town, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, in 1744. Whether it was a formal pact, as described by one of the Wahhabi sources,[10] or an alliance that strengthened more gradually, is currently the attention of further research.[11] However, the meeting and joining of forces of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Sa'ud has had far-reaching consequences for that region and for the world at large in years to come. Two years later, a conquest of the territories of the Arabian Peninsula started. Recent historical appraisals of this period now suggest that the first attack may have come from the enemies of the Wahhabis, disturbed by the accusations of disbelief from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.[12] However, as Crawford puts it: 'Whether or not the outbreak of the conflict was initiated by the Wahhabis, it was predetermined by their uncompromising doctrines.' The official launch of the offensive '*jihad*' against opponents took place in 1746, that is, about two years after his

arrival in al-Dir'iyya. People had to surrender, or see their lives and property at risk.

In spite of the deaths of Muhammad ibn Saʿud in 1765 and of Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab in 1792, the movement did not weaken. In actual fact, under the leadership of the son of Muhammad ibn Saʿud, whose name was ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (1765–1803), the Wahhabis managed to acquire Riyadh, Kharj and Qasim, even establishing a temporary hegemony over Taʾif (1802), Mecca (1803) and Madina (1804), where they ordered the destruction of domed tombs and monuments on graves, due to their belief that visitors to these monuments were associating partners to God.

A few years later, the Ottoman Empire managed to send the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad ʿAli Pasha (and then, after his death, his son Ibrahim) and his troops to fight against the Wahhabis in 1811. The Saudi historian Madawi al-Rasheed[13] explains that the expansion of this first Saudi-Wahhabi state was actually a 'realm with fluctuating boundaries' because of tribal confederations, which were still challenging the descendants of al-Saʿud, and their authority over their emirate was therefore made all the more difficult to establish. When the Ottoman troops arrived, some of those who had suffered raids at the hands of the Wahhabis switched allegiance to Pasha, and on 11 September 1818, the Wahhabis surrendered. They saw their capital, Dirʿiyya, destroyed and had some of their major leaders and people of knowledge killed or forced into exile. This marked the end of the first Saudi-Wahhabi emirate.[14]

After this, there was a second phase, which took place between 1824 and 1891, during which the descendants of the beheaded ruler of the first Saudi-Wahhabi state attempted to re-establish some authority in the Peninsula. However, they were but one tribe among others fighting for power over a given territory in Arabia, as the Rashids in the north and the Sharifs in Mecca were also attempting to consolidate their power in their own territories.

This period, troubled by rivalry between Saudi brothers, ended with the flight of 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Sa'ud from Riyadh, which had been the capital of the second fragile emirate, to Kuwait.

In Kuwait, the Sa'ud family formed ties with the al-Sabah rulers, and it is from Kuwait that they prepared the attack on Riyadh in 1902. This saw the beginning of the formation of what is now known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded in 1932, after 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Sa'ud (known as Ibn Sa'ud) conquered the peninsula, assisted by a troop of Wahhabi fighters named the *Ikhwan*. Ibn Sa'ud was also helped by the British plan to abandon the Sharifs of the Hijaz, and by the fact that he signed a treaty with the British in 1915, mentioning:

> '[the British government acknowledged:] Najd, Hasa, Qatif and Jubayl and their dependencies and territories are the countries of Ibn Saud' and that aggression to these territories 'will result in the British government giving aid to Ibn Saud'. On signing the treaty, Ibn Saud received 1,000 rifles and a sum of £20,000, and the treaty was also providing a monthly subsidy of £5,000 and regular shipment of machine guns and rifles.[15]

After the capture of Hijaz in 1925, a new treaty was signed in May 1927 in Jeddah, which acknowledged Ibn Sa'ud as 'His Majesty the King of Hejaz and Najd and its dependencies', in exchange for him entertaining good relations with Kuwait, Bahrain and the Sheikhs of Qatar and the Oman coast. The treaty was made to a man, as opposed to a state, which made it unique.[16]

After 1926, Ibn Sa'ud could not travel further north, as this move would antagonise his British allies in Kuwait, and most of the rest of the Peninsula he had already conquered. When his fighting

troops, the *Ikhwan*, decided there should be nothing stopping them from conquering the whole of the Muslim world (and beyond) and they started to make power-sharing demands. Ibn Saʻud was helped by the British to crush them and tame their zeal. Before doing so, he sought the advice of the religious establishment. The *fatwa* that was released is seen as the first[17] of a series of Wahhabi religious edicts, aimed at consolidating the Saudi regime.

On 22 September 1932, Ibn Saʻud founded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia *(al-mamlaka al-ʻarabiyya al-saʻudiyya)* to highlight the role that he played in unifying the Peninsula and to impose his line of descent as rulers. It was after the first oil concession in 1933 (which was set up originally to provide money for Ibn Saʻud who was heavily indebted at the time), and only after World War II when the USA started to consider oil as a matter of national security, that the ties between the USA and Saudi Arabia became stronger. The leaders of Saudi Arabia were concerned over the rising in power of the Hashemites in Jordan, which constituted a real threat to their power. The Palestinian issue was a source of tension in the relationship between the USA and Saudi Arabia, but was not considered as a reason to prevent cooperation, as can be illustrated by the help provided by King Faysal to the US Army in Vietnam, despite this being during the embargo against the USA over the handling of the Yom Kippur war in 1973.[18]

All the subsequent kings of Saudi Arabia have been Ibn Saʻud's sons: Saud (1953–1964), Faysal (1964–1975), Khalid (1975–1982), Fahd (1982–2005), ʻAbdullah (2005–2015) and Salman (2015–present). The increase in funds following the 1973 oil crisis led the country into an economic boom that allowed Saudi Arabia to develop very rapidly. In terms of religion, it helped the Wahhabis spread their version of history and their teachings far beyond the limits of their territories. People returning to their country of origin from Hajj now left with free literature, paid for by petrodollars.

Is there a pre-Wahhabi and post-Wahhabi era?

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab viewed his mission as very important, to the extent that his biographers and support often portray the division of history between a pre-mission and post-mission era, during which they believe that the oneness of God has been put back into the centre position it should never have left. The Wahhabi historians Ibn Ghannam and Ibn Bishr, who authored the main historical sources available today on the beginnings of Wahhabism, have always considered the bloody[19] wars inspired by the teachings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab as a 'purification'. An example of this can be found in George Rentz's thesis,[20] as summarised by al-Rasheed, which was re-published[21] in 2006 in cooperation with the King 'Abdul 'Aziz Library:

[In] the eighteenth century, there was a man called Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who was tormented by the blasphemy, corruption and polytheism of his own society, which exhibited religious practices worse than those of the *Kafirs* of Quraysh at the time of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. He took it upon himself to 'reform' the polytheists of Arabia. As a man of religion, he needed a man of the sword to launch an uncompromising *jihad* against all those Muslim-polytheists and innovators who visited holy men for intercession, sought blessing from trees, and chanted supplications to dead men in their graves. A combination of corrupted religious scholars, sorcerers and charlatans had previously sold them amulets and concoctions, thus diverting them from the true path of Islam. The reformist found in Muhammad ibn Saud, the ruler of a small insignificant town called Deriyyah, a good, pious Muslim who endorsed the religious reformist and put him under his wing. An alliance was struck between the man of religion and the man of the sword, after which a violent

'Islamising' *Jihadi* campaign was launched with the sword to bring people back to monotheism. After half a century of blood shed, raids, expansion, death and famines, as people are not easily convinced to abandon their blasphemy, a state called the Unitarian Empire was born. The story is meant to be authentic as it draws on local chronicles and legends propagated by eyewitnesses, nobody but those Unitarians themselves who were contemporary followers of the reformist, personalities like Husain ibn Ghannam and the late Othman ibn Bishr, both were 'Unitarian' historians.[22]

She then adds:

The ARAMCO version of Saudi-Wahhabi history is unfortunately still popular as a meta-narrative infused with mystification. Its methodology is flawed, as it is dependent on chronicles, whose main objective was to demonise Arabian society in order to justify the bloodshed, divisions and fragmentation that accompanied Saudi-Wahhabi expansion since the eighteenth century. The narrative is dominant in Western academic scholarship, Saudi history text books, and Arab historiography.[23]

This is exactly what Esther Peskes mentioned 24 years ago in her PhD thesis, that is, that the two Wahhabi historians used extensively by academics, make a bipartition of history into the pre-Wahhabi and the Wahhabi eras and these two historians are referred to with minimal critical assessment. The dogmatics of the movement played an important part in their own vision of history. Peskes points out:

Up to now, one of our main sources of knowledge about the rise of Wahhabism and the early Saudi-Wahhabi state is the Wahhabi historiography represented by the historical works of Husain b. Ghannam (d.1811) and Uthman b. Abdallah

b. Bishr (d.1873). These two works have been frequently used and cited without any critical evaluation of their contents or of their necessary biased points of view. The uncritical usage of this historiography combined with the scarcity of other sources for research have been the main reasons for the fact that a Wahhabi concept of history has, for a long time, been dominant, even in western research. One of the most characteristic features of this concept is the reduction of the pre-Wahhabi period to a simple state of 'religious ignorance' or 'un-Islamic conditions' which seemed to be the main and self-evident reason for the rise of Wahhabism in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula by the middle of the eighteenth century.[24]

Indeed, many articles dating from before Peskes' thesis do reproduce this vision of history[25] or facts about Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's life that can only be found in one source, such as his knowing the Qur'an by heart at the age of ten which is, according to Peskes,[26] reported only by Ibn Ghannam.[27] The same uncritical approaches are to be found even in academic works written after Peskes' thesis.[28] It appears that the results of Peskes' work have not been exploited or acknowledged enough in most of the subsequent articles written about the subject, some of them reiterating word by word the works of the two Najdi chroniclers,[29] with the exception of a few writers: Traboulsi,[30] Commins,[31] Crawford,[32] Mouline,[33] Redissi and Nouira.[34]

One of these writers, Mouline, highlights how the supporters of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab like to compare the life of the leader to the life of Prophet Muhammad himself. For example, they make a parallel between his experience in al-Ahsa and the event during which the Prophet was not received favourably in the city of Ta'if. They also see a divine sign in the migration of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab from Uyayna to al-Dir'iyya, invoking the famous *hijrah* or migration of the Prophet of Islam from Mecca to Medina.[35]

It remains to be fully established historically whether the worship of other than God was so widespread in the Arabian Peninsula that it justified the actions of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in order to 'purify' the Muslim creed. Other academics have questioned the very existence of widespread polytheism in Najd, and therefore the reliability of the propaganda distributed by the Wahhabis and almost taken for granted by Western scholarship, such as al-Dakhil, in his thesis,[36] and Zdanowski.[37] In a chapter entitled 'The Question of Shirk', al-Dakhil argues:

> In conclusion, the writings of the *sheikh* and his followers on the religious conditions in Najd reveal very little in terms of the evidence about the extent of *shirk* in that region. In fact, if they reveal anything in this regard, it is that *shirk* in Najd was simple in nature and limited in scope. This contradicts the widely-held view that the main instigating factore [sic] behind the rise of the Wahhabi movement was the deteriorating religious condition in Najd, taking the form of *shirk* being widely believed and practiced among the people in that region. And so the cause of the Wahhabi movement was the eradication of *shirk*, on the one hand, and the restoration of *tawheed*, on the other.'[38]

Thus, he explains, that right from the start, the debate was most likely a theoretical one, as opposed to one that sprung about due to the social conditions and behaviours of the local population, that is, a debate about the definition of what constitutes the worship of other than God and what does not.

Zdanowski also draws the conclusion that the sources are too scarce to give us a precise idea of what gave rise to Wahhabism:

> In my opinion, there is a more serious problem regarding the reconstruction of the political history of Central Arabia in this

period. The problem is that the aforementioned Arabic chronicles represent a strong pro-Wahhabi position and their authors – especially Ibn Ghannam and Ibn Bishr – were faithful servants to their lords.[39]

Some of the events related here, however, do support the analyses of Peskes[40] and Cook[41] that Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab used to consider his understanding of Islam as superior to that of his teachers. Cook informs us that Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab wrote in a letter that no one among his teachers really knew about Islam, and none of theirs did either, for centuries preceding his [Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's] appearance. Cook translates this extract from one of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's personal letters:

> I will tell you about myself. By God, apart from Whom there is no god, I sought learning (*talabtu l-'ilm*), and those who knew me believed that I had some; yet at that time I did not know the meaning of 'there is no god but God', nor did I know the religion of Islam, before this blessing (*khayr*) which God vouchsafed to me. Likewise not one among my teachers knew it; if any of the scholars of the Arid claims that he knew the meaning of Islam, before this time, or maintains that any of his teachers knew it, he lies, fabricates, leads people astray, and falsely praises himself.[42]

This extract gives an insight of his outlook on religious teaching and the way he viewed his mission. His main motivation was coming from his deeply held view that he had a role to play in safeguarding people from Hellfire. As Mouline puts it, 'we must resign ourselves to admitting that, on the one hand, "not everything in history is explained by the state of the society" and that, on the other hand, "there are men for whom the relationships with God are the important affair, the immense affair of life"'.[43]

The naming of his movement: from Wahhabis to Salafis and Salafists

How to call the movement is also a sensitive and controversial issue. For example, Bowen, in her book dedicated to the history of Islam in the UK, has entitled her chapter on Salafism 'Don't call us Wahhabis!', to sum up the existing feelings of the community now going under the name of the 'Salafis'.

However, during the course of the twentieth century, there emerged growing evidence to suggest that the Wahhabis were entering a phase where they started to accept the name 'Wahhabi', despite the fact that it was pejorative when it was first used. Some Western writers are of the view that the term 'Wahhabi' was coined by Westerners who had travelled in the area when Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was acquiring power.[44] This theory is endorsed by some supporters of Wahhabism and has been circulated among them.[45] However, Redissi and Nouira[46] have mentioned that this explanation indicated a significant oversight of the very first source that we possess concerning the naming of the movement as Wahhabis: the refutation written by Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. He was Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's own brother, bearing the same family name. He used the term '*al-Wahhabiyya*' in his title *al-Sawa'iq al-Ilahiyya fi al-radd 'ala al-Wahhabiyya*'[47] released between 1752 and 1753.[48] This is probably the earliest mention of the name Wahhabi to refer to the teachings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab.

Redissi and Nouira[49] also show that the term has been used and endorsed by the Wahhabis themselves, at some point. To prove this point, they refer to two examples. The first one is a collection of letters published by a prominent Wahhabi, Sulayman ibn Sihman (d.1930), entitled *al-Hidaya al-sunniyya wa l-tuhfa al-Wahhabiyya al-Najdiyya* (*The Sunni guidance and the achievement of Najdi Wahhabism*) and it appears that King 'Abd al-Aziz himself

ordered the impression of this collection. Redissi and Nouira take note that Ibn Sihman presents the collection as *Letters of the Imams*[50] *of Najd and its Scholars in the Wahhabi Call to Renew Islam* (*Rasa'il a'imma Najd wa ulama'iha fi al-da'wa al-wahhabiyya li-tajdid al-islam*), thereby using the term *wahhabi* to refer to the trend founded by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. The second example is the book published by Rashid Rida in 1925, who was sympathetic to the Wahhabis, and whose book is nevertheless entitled *al-Wahhabiyyun wa al-Hijaz*.[51] There are more recent examples, not mentioned by the quoted authors, such as a treatise by Ibn Baz (d.1999), who held the title of Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia between 1993 and 1999, where he describes the creed of his movement by explicitly utilising the term *Wahhabiyya*:

> The Wahhabiyya, as the writer tends to put it[52], are not new in rejecting all such innovations. Their creed is to hold fast to the Book of Allâh and the Sunnah of His Messenger; to follow his footsteps and those of his rightly-guided Successors; to believe and practise what was propounded by the virtuous Predecessors [*Salaf*] and the Imâms of learning and guidance who were capable to issue religious injunction [...] concerning the knowledge of Allâh, and His Attributes of perfection and dignity as shown in the Glorious Book and the authentic Ahâdith (traditions) of the Prophet and as wholeheartedly accepted by his Companions.
>
> The Wahhabiyya believe in them, the way they are reported without any alteration, personification, exemplifying or negation of such attributes. They stick to the way of the Successors and their followers from among the people of learning, Faith and piety. They believe that the foundation of the Faith is to bear witness that there is none to be worshipped except Allâh and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allâh. To them, this is the root of Faith and one of its most exalted branches as well.[53]

The use of the term Wahhabi to describe the movement, in academic studies and elsewhere, is often simply explained by its practicality, as Rentz mentions: 'for the sake of convenience'.[54] Another explanation given for the use of the term Wahhabi is the one presented by Algar[55] who, after discussing the fact that their preferred name (*muwahhidun*) is an 'exclusive claim to the principle of *tauhid* that is the foundation of Islam itself',[56] suggests that

> there is no reason to acquiesce in this assumption of monopoly, and because the movement in question was ultimately the work of one man, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab, it is reasonable as well as conventional to speak of 'Wahhabism' and 'Wahhabis'.[57]

Commins, in an article dedicated to the renaming of the Wahhabis to '*Salafis*' also starts by saying:

> As awkward as it may be in a chapter about the rhetorical deployment of names, I use the terms Wahhabi and Wahhabism as a matter of convention to refer to Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teachings and the movement inspired by those teachings.[58]

Even though the term Wahhabi started to be somewhat accepted and somehow widespread, the Wahhabis have recently managed to rename themselves with something which has a much more positive connotation: the Salafis. Historically, it is possible that Rashid Rida was at the source of the trend of naming the Wahhabis 'Salafis'. In his treatise entitled *al-Khilafa aw al-imama al-'uzma*, which is a collection of articles from the journal *al-Manar*, Rashid Rida calls the inhabitants of Najd, the province of origin of Wahhabism, '*Hanbali Salafiyya* who call their Emir an Imam and not a caliph'.[59] Laoust is of the view that, here, Rashid Rida was probably using the term to describe several reformist movements which all try to return

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Islam to the purity of the *Salaf*. Rashid Rida's treatise was written between the end of 1922 and the first half of 1923. This is the earliest historical example we have of Wahhabism being referred to as *Salafiyya*. From that date onwards, it is difficult to assess to what extent the Wahhabis did reuse this term for themselves. What is well-known, rather, is that they preferred the name *muwahhidun* to any other name, that is, the upholders of the Unity of God. In any case, the insistence by the Wahhabis in being called *Salafis* is tangible from the 1950s[60] and 1970s, and this has become even more evident in the last two decades. There is a series of books which have been published in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and which specifically categorises the Wahhabis not as Wahhabis but as *Salafis*. For example, books entitled: *al-Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, hayatuhu, atharuhu, daʿwatu al-Salafiyah*[61] (*Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab: his Life, his Legacy, and his Salafi Preaching*); *al-Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab aw intisar al-manhaj al-salafi*,[62] (*Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, or the Victory of the Salafi Manhaj*), and also *Daʿwa al-Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, salafiyya la wahhabiyya*,[63] (*The Call of Imam Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab was Salafi and not Wahhabi*). The Wahhabis are rewriting their history so as to be rebranded as *Salafis*. Commins explains that 'in the 1970s, Saudi intellectual production work took a new turn as students and graduates of the religious faculties constructed a *Salafi* patrimony for Wahhabism.'[64]

An illustration of this trend is the re-naming of the thesis of the Saudi historian ʿUwaidah Metaireek al-Juhany, submitted to the University of Washington in 1983, *The History of Najd prior to the Wahhabis*,[65] which became, in 2002, *Najd Before the Salafi Reform Movement*[66] when published 20 years later. In an endnote to the title of the thesis, he said:

> Wahhabi and Wahhabis are used here because the term is widely used and recognized, and it no longer denotes a negative attribution.[67]

However, this note became, in the published book:

> So *Salafi* and Salafis, or Saudi and Saudis will be used here because they are the names used and liked by the followers of the movement.[68]

The thesis has been published in association with the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives.

When it came to selecting a term to use in the present book, the fact that the adjective *salafi* is understood by some to mean 'identical to the *Salaf*' or 'in direct relation to the *Salaf*', did not make it the simplest choice, as the term chosen needed to convey the idea of 'people who define themselves as following the *Salaf*', but without implying whether they are or not. Using *salafi* was even less of an option when it is known that there are groups other than the Wahhabis that have used this name for themselves in the past, as seen above. Had the term *salafi* been used here, there would have been a constant need to exclude these other groups which are not part of the topic of this book. On the other hand, if only the term Wahhabis was used, the group would not be easily identifiable, as the 'Wahhabis-self-named-Salafis' do not call themselves Wahhabis today, and tend to deny that this name existed in the first place, precisely because they now want to be called *Salafis*. We finally settled on using 'Wahhabism' when talking about those who follow Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab for this historical part, and 'Salafists' and 'Salafism' from now on when referring to them, in order for the name to be more familiar to those who will hear it.

A typology of Salafists

Wiktorowicz describes a useful typology consisting of three categories of Salafist. Although more recent typologies have also refined it,[69] it remains useful for our purpose:

The different contextual readings have produced three major factions in the community: the purists, the politicos, and the jihadis. The purists emphasize a focus on non-violent methods of propagation, purification, and education. They view politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy. Politicos, in contrast, emphasize application of the *Salafi* creed to the political arena, which they view as particularly important because it dramatically impacts social justice and the right of God alone to legislate. Jihadis take a more militant position and argue that the current context calls for violence and revolution. All three factions share a common creed but offer different explanations of the contemporary world and its concomitant problems and thus propose different solutions. The splits are about contextual analysis, not belief.[70]

Wiktorowicz presents a relevant analysis of the Salafists by dividing them into three factions. The terminology that he presents, that is, purists, politicos and jihadis, will be used throughout the book to differentiate between the factions of the Salafists, although quietists will also be used for purists. This typology has its limitations, for instance by excluding the quietists' recourse to violence, but it does have the merit of providing a working model that retains present-day relevance.

The quietists are the most numerous among the Salafists. Typically, they scrupulously abide by the edicts of the official clerics in Saudi Arabia and follow their recommendations to the letter. They emphasise the impermissibility of suicide bombings and terrorism by relaying the *fatwas* of their scholars upon these issues. The religious figures whom the quietists recognise are the Saudis Ibn Baz (d.1999) and Ibn 'Uthaymin (d.2000), and the Syrian al-Albani (d.1999). The quietists are subdivided into other categories as the result of internal politics but, on the whole, they form a coherent group.

The second category that Wiktorowicz has identified is the politicos who are engaged in reforming society and debating current

political problems both in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. They, too, recognise the three personalities quoted above, alongside the two reformists Safar al-Hawali (b.1950) and Salman al-'Awda (b.1955) from the *Sahwa* movement which advocates a 'revival' of Muslim society. Contemporary figures like Dr Haitham al-Haddad, founder of islam21c.com, who focus upon current affairs, might also be in this category. Al-Hawali and al-'Awda were imprisoned for several years by the Saudi government because of their political activism, but after their release and the apparent rejection of their former positions, they have gradually been reintegrated into official positions.[71] These two leaders are personally active on the internet (al-'Awda, for example, has more than 12 million followers on Twitter) and are arguably more engaged with young people and current affairs than other established Saudi clerics.

The third category of Salafists are those that Wiktorowicz has named the jihadis. Their interpretation of the current situation is that there is sufficient justification for violent confrontation with the West and its allies. This category may be further divided into other sub-groups based upon the extent to which cooperation with non-Muslim authorities is permitted. Their sources of inspiration are Osama bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qa'ida and affiliated groups. Nowadays they are mostly represented by the leaders of 'IS'. This group is at the centre of many recent studies and scholarly works.

The three factions of Salafists share the same theological background and this is why shared sources will be referenced in the next chapters, in order to study their understanding of the belief in God and His Attributes.

What was the position of the Wahhabis on the issue of the Attributes of God?

As we saw earlier, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab mentioned the issue of the Attributes of God relatively briefly. He did,

again briefly, express his opposition to the *Ash'aris* and to the interpretation of the attributes but not in detail.[72] His son, 'Abdullah (d.1828), and his grand-son, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan (d.1869), however, did expand and condemn the interpretation of the Attributes of God when they either commented on their ancestor's books or were asked to clarify the beliefs of the Wahhabis on these issues.

'Abdullah is narrated to have expounded on their belief with regards to the attributes that they follow the path of the *Salaf* which he calls 'not only the safest, but also the most erudite and the wisest, contrary to those who say that it is the way of the *Khalaf* which is more erudite'. In the same compendium of reference answers from the Najdi figures, 'Abdullah is also narrated to have been told by someone who attended most of what happened when Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was alive, that they are to take the texts on the Attributes of God according to their literal meaning (*'ala dhahiriha*).[73] This appears to be the earliest mention by the Wahhabi clerics with regards to their position of taking those verses and *hadiths* according to their literal meaning.

His grandson, when explaining his book *Kitab al-Tawhid*, also stressed that, as for these ambiguous *hadiths*, the Prophet 'never said that the apparent meaning was not the intended one'.[74]

These quotes show the origins of the teachings of the Wahhabis on the topic: they have been against interpretation of ambiguous verses from the beginning of their movement, in keeping with the precursors that have inspired the founder, Ibn Taymiyya. After their rise, the debate was renewed in modern times, with various consequences.

CHAPTER 4

MODERN APPROACHES SINCE THE RISE OF WAHHABISM

Since the rise of Wahhabism: a consensus on the position of the *Salaf*

We noted in Chapter 3 that, until Wahhabism arrived, a consensus had been established by Sunni scholars surrounding the idea that the scholars of the *Salaf* did not take the ambiguous religious texts about God in a literal fashion, as this would necessitate suggesting that God resembles His creations. We will see that after the rise of Wahhabism, the traditional Sunni scholars continued to define the position of the *Salaf* regarding those Attributes as they always had. The only difference, if one is to compare both periods, is that their works are very much centered on attempting to refute the works of the Salafists. The works have grown even more numerous in the last 50 years, which coincides with the rise of their insistence on being called *Salafis*. It appears that it was the reimpression and re-edition, in the 1940s, of long-forgotten anthropomorphic works under the name of '*Aqa'id al-Salaf*[1] that triggered a new wave of works by traditional Sunni scholars to explain why the elements mentioned in those newly edited books were, in their view, incorrect. To understand why the positions of

those scholars are more defensive than those in the previous section, one can note the works of al-Kawthari (d.1951). He was the assistant of the last caliph of the Ottoman Empire and was considered a *mujaddid* (i.e., renewer of the religion, a title which can only be granted to one scholar every century because of his efforts and works to clarify and spread the religion of Islam for his contemporaries) by the historian Abu Zahrah (d.1974).[2] Al-Kawthari was an *Ash'ari Hanafi* scholar who wrote, among other works, several articles against the trend of anthropomorphism being spread in Egypt at that time. He is also the one to whom we owe a few editions of books by Muslim writers from the Middle Ages who wrote against anthropomorphism, notably Ibn al-Jawzi's[3] book, quoted in Chapter 2. Al-Kawthari also wrote an article entitled *'Tahdhir al-Umma min da'at al-wathniyya'* ('Warning to the Umma against Polytheistic Preachers'), in which he denounces the reimpression of those books. He ends this article with a recommendation:

> Now it is up to *al-Azhar al-Sharif* not to delay standing up to its duty towards this book by al-Darimi and what is similar to it, to protect the creed of the masses, and to stop its distribution within their own frontiers [i.e., in Egypt]. And God says the truth and He is the one who guides.[4]

He clearly calls the creed of the claimants of the *Salaf* 'polytheism', which means that he believes the one who holds this creed is not a Muslim. He is denouncing the creed that they offer to people: believing that God rested on a rock while writing the Torah with a pen, believing that God created Moses by 'touching Adam with His hand'[5] and other narrations inconsistent with the existing accepted definition of God and His Attributes in *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* theology. Al-Kawthari had foresight in his warnings: it appears that these books are now more widely available than they were at the time he wrote this article.

Al-Kawthari also retraces the history of anthropomorphism in Islamic history in another article entitled 'The Tribulations of the anthropomorphists'[6] where he links the current callers to the *Salafi* movement to Ibn Taymiyya, and then Ibn Taymiyya to 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-Darimi (d.894).[7] This is the trend of the latest writings on this issue: there is an emphasis on retracing the history of this creed to demonstrate to people the fact that almost none of the arguments of today's Salafists are new, that they were never accepted in the past, and that they never will be. As al-Kawthari puts it:

> Blasphemy is blasphemy regardless of whoever said it, and misguidance is misguidance whatever its sources. There is not, in Islam, a belief which should change with the change of people. Indeed, Faith is faith absolutely, and unbelief is unbelief absolutely.[8]

So, for this reason, the main argument of al-Kawthari, but also of the authors of the books that will be mentioned in this section, is that this creed was and still is incorrect, and that the *Salaf* never understood the ambiguous verses in the literal fashion proposed by the Salafists. After a chronological presentation of the books used to collect the opinions of a selection of various scholars and writers defending the traditional Sunni position on this issue, their positions will be explained.

Additional information on excerpts

This is a presentation of the sources of excerpts used in this chapter and their authors, in chronological order of the authors' dates of death:

– *Ithaf al-sadat al-muttaqin*, *sharh Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*[9] by al-Murtada al-Zabidi (d.1791). Al-Murtada al-Zabidi was a specialist in lexicography, famous for having written *Taj al-'arus*,

a commentary of the *Qamus*, an ancient Arabic dictionary. His commentary of the *Ihya* spans over 14 volumes.[10]

— *al-Manhal al-'adhb al-mawrud sharh Sunan Abi Da'ud*[11] and *Ithaf al-ka'inat bi bayan madhhab al-Salaf wa al-khalaf fi al-mutashabihat*[12] by Abu Muhammad Mahmud ibn Muhammad ibn Khattab al-Subki al-Azhari (d.1932), the founder of the Association for Islamic Law in Egypt. *Al-Manhal* is a commentary on the Sunan of Abu Da'ud (d.889), one of the six canonical collections of *hadith* accepted by the Sunnis in general. *Ithaf al-ka'inat* is exclusively dedicated to the issue of how the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* have dealt with the issues of the ambiguous verses. It begins with a *fatwa* written by al-Subki al-Azhari and signed and confirmed by a group of scholars from al-Azhar. The rest of the book consists of a thorough census of the different sayings, interpretations and judgements of Muslim scholars regarding the ambiguous verses throughout history and in chronological order.

— *Majallat al-Azhar* was a periodical from al-Azhar. Here, we will use articles by Yusuf al-Dujwi (d.1945), who is described in it as being among the greatest scholars of al-Azhar University, and Ibrahim al-Dusuqi, a former Minister of Awqaf in Egypt.

— *Manahil al-'irfan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an*[13] by Muhammad 'Abd al-'Adhim al-Zurqani (d.1947), the descendant of historically renowned scholars of al-Azhar, himself teaching sciences of the Qur'an in the college of the Foundations of the Religion in al-Azhar (*kulliyat Usul al-Din*).

— *al-Barahin al-sati'a fi radd ba'd al-bida' al-sha'i'a*[14] by Salama al-Quda'i al-'Azzami (d.1956), who was an Egyptian scholar contemporaneous with al-Kawthari. His book aims to provide a thorough refutation of Wahhabi teachings.

— *Bara'at al-Ash'ariyyin min 'aqa'id al-mukhalifin*[15] by Abu Hamid ibn Marzuq (d.1970), an *Ash'ari* scholar.

— *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*[16] by the late *Maliki* North African scholar Muhammad Fadil ibn 'Ashur (d.1973), who was from a well-established family of scholars and a scholar in his own right.

– *Al-Mizan al-Adil li-tamyiz al-haqq wa al-batil*[17] by a Syrian
scholar from Aleppo, 'Abd al-Qadir 'Isa Diyab, who passed away
on an unknown date. He wrote this book in 1978 to gain a degree
in Sharia Law and it was published in 2008. The book is
presented as a scholarly refutation of a book by a Muhammad
Ahmad 'Abd al-Salam, whom we understand was considered a
Wahhabi by Diyab.

– *al-Sharh al-Qawim fi hal alfaz al-Sirat al-mustaqim*[18] by Abdullah
al-Harari al-Habashi (d.2008), who had an *Ash'ari* and *Shafi'i*
background. This work contains ample details of the method of
the *Salaf* concerning the ambiguous verses. He is famous for his
antagonism towards Wahhabism.[19]

– *al-Salafiyya: marhala zamaniyya mubaraka la madhhab islami*[20] by
Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti (d.2013), who was the Chair
of the Theology Department of Damascus University and an
internationally renowned thinker. His work argues against the
establishment of Salafism as a separate Islamic school, without
diminishing the importance and influence of the *Salaf* in the
Muslim Sunni world.

al-Subki al-Azhari (d.1932)

The al-Azhar scholar, founder of the Association for Islamic Law in
Egypt and commentator of the *Sunan* of Abu Da'ud (d.889), one of
the six canonical collections of *hadith* accepted by the Sunnis,
wrote, when he reached the *hadith* known as 'the *hadith* of the
female slave':

> For every instance of the word '*ayna*' generally attributed to
> Him [i.e., God] then it should not be understood as a place
> and its apparent meaning should be rejected (*masruqat*) by
> consensus of both the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf*, because of His
> saying '*laysa kamithlihi shay*" [Q 42:11] [i.e., 'There is
> nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All seeing'].
> The only difference is that the *Salaf* would say 'We believe in

it and in all similar things among the ambiguous verses, without delving into the meaning, and with the belief that there is nothing like God.' This is safer, and this is our way. As for the *Khalaf*, they would interpret it according to what we have mentioned above [he gave several interpretations for '*ayna*' and '*sama*' in the explanation of the *hadith*].[21]

Here also, just as was the case before Wahhabism appeared, the approaches deemed correct are divided into two: the way of the *Salaf* (consisting of interpreting broadly by not accepting the literal meaning), and the way of the *Khalaf* (where detailed intepretations are given). He stresses the consensus of both the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* on discarding the literal meaning. In his *fatwa* against the belief that God would be in a direction or in the sky (which he denounces as outright unbelief), al-Subki says:[22]

Concerning the way of the *salaf* (the scholars of the first three centuries) and *khalaf* (scholars after the *salaf*) in dealing with the *aayahs* [sic] and *hadith* that do not have only one possible or well-known meaning: they all agreed that Allah is clear of and above the attributes of whatever has a beginning. Therefore, He does not have a place for Him on the *Arsh* or the sky or anywhere else. He is also not attributed with settling in or on anything that has a beginning, and not with transformation or movement or the like. Rather, He is as he was before the existence of the *Arsh* or the *Kursi* or the skies and other things that have a beginning. The *Haafith* (ibn Hajar al-Asqalani) said in *al-Fath* (*Fath-ul-Baariy* – the explanation of al-Bukhaariy): 'the *Fuqahaa*' (*fiqh* scholars) all agreed, from east to west, upon the belief in the Qur'an and the *hadith* that trustworthy people related from the Prophet (may Allah raise his rank) about the Attributes of Allah, without likening them to creation or explanation.'

They only disagreed on the matter of explaining the meaning of these *aayahs*, so the *salaf* [i.e., most of them] believe in them as they were related and that they are not literally meant, because of the saying of Allah which means, 'He does not resemble anything and He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing', and leave the meaning be, due to the saying of Allah that means: 'and noone knows their meaning except Allah' [*suurah* 3, 5 – more details later].

Accordingly, they say regarding the *Aayah 'Al-Rahman,'alaa al-'Arsh istawa'* [if literally translated it would say 'He established on the throne'], that He *'istawa'* in a sense that befits Him, and only He knows it, and regarding the *aayah ''a 'amintum man fii al-samaa'* [if literally translated it would say: 'Do You feel safe from who is in the sky?'] that we believe in it and the meaning that Allah gave it, while clearing Him of the attributes of whatever has a beginning and of settling (in a place.) They also say about the *Aayah 'yad-ullahi fawqa aydiyhim'* [if literally translated it would say: 'His hand is above their hands'] that He has a *'yad'* not like our *yad* [i.e., our hand], and only Allah knows it'. This was their way in dealing with these *aayahs* that do not have only a single possible meaning or only one famous meaning.[23]

This quote, like the others mentioned in this section, illustrates the position of the *Salaf* as presented by twentieth-century scholars: their explanations are longer and they tend to include more information, details and examples on this issue than the scholars of the previous period. It might be because previous scholars thought this was an easy matter, hardly ever challenged. Today, it is a contested point which needs clarification, hence the length of the explanations. Al-Subki al-Azhari continued after this *fatwa* with a long list of scholarly quotes, gathering interpretations of the most well-known ambiguous religious texts about God.

al-Dujwi (d.1945)

Yusuf al-Dujwi, described as one of the greatest scholars of al-Azhar of his time, wrote in the Magazine of al-Azhar:

> Know that the *Salaf* were declaring the impossibility of the *'Uluww* of God in the meaning of a place, unlike some ignorant people who have a shameful position on this issue. Indeed the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* agree on the exemption of God from any resemblance with His creations (*tanzih*).[24]

After mentioning that it is impossible to take the verses and *hadiths* dealing with the Attributes of God according to their literal meaning, he states:

> This is the consensus (*ijma'*) of the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf*.[25]

These quotes demonstrate that a scholar from those considered the 'greatest' of al-Azhar confirms that there was a consensus between the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* that the literal meaning should not be taken into account.

al-Zurqani (d.1947)

Muhammad 'Abd al-'Adhim Al-Zurqani, who is also from al-Azhar, says:

> These factions [referring to anthropomorphists in general] are relying upon the verse '*al-Rahman 'ala l-'Arsh istawa*', so we say: the whole of the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* have agreed upon the fact that the literal meaning of '*istawa 'ala l''arsh*', which is: 'sitting, being in place and being limited,' is impossible because of the irrefutable proofs of the exemption of Allah from any resemblance to His creations, or from needing anything from them, be it a place to be in or other than this. They have also agreed over the fact that the literal

meaning is absolutely not the meaning willed by God, because He denied about Himself that He would resemble the creations, and He confirmed about Himself the fact that He does not need them: '*Laysa kamithlihi shay*" and He also said '*wa huwa al-Ghaniyyou al-Hamid*', therefore if He had meant the apparent meaning, there would have been contradictions {in the Qur'an}.

However, they have differed after that. The Salafis (*Salafiyyun*) {here he means the people of the first three centuries. This is not a reference to a movement here} were leaving out the specificity of the meaning of *istiwa* to God, as He knows best about what He attributed Himself with and He knows best about what is suitable for Him and for them there are no proofs for such a specification. And the *khalaf* chose to interpret, after some attributed to God what they do not understand (...) Those who chose to make an interpretation were afterwards divided into two categories: the group of the *Ash'aris* who were interpreting without specifying a meaning, saying: 'indeed the intended meaning of the verse is the fact that God is attributed with a revealed attribute (*sifat sama'iyya*) which we do not know specifically'; and those who came after that who were specifying a meaning, saying the intended meaning of *al-istawa* here is control and domination, without composition, because the language includes this meaning (...)[26]

Here, the principles on which both scholars from the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* agree are highlighted, to make sure that the positions are not perceived as being diametrically opposed, but rather coincide.

al-Quda'i (d.1956)

After retracing the history of the Wahhabis and highlighting different issues in which he feels they have violated the consensus of the Sunni scholars (among them an issue on divorce), Salama al-

Quda'i al-'Azzami, who was an Egyptian scholar contemporaneous with al-Kawthari, explains:

> The people of the first centuries were upon a pure creed, and in a healthy state of mind (*salamat al-fitra*) and they used to stay away from delving into issues which are not of their concern among the detailed sciences. Therefore it was enough that they knew, of the belief of the exemption of God, what does not befit Him, like the created things in general (...) and that it was appropriate to leave the knowledge of the meaning to the One who does know it. And this is exactly what many from the *Salaf* did (...)
>
> But then when passions spread, and purity from the hearts has lessened, when the *hashawiyya* (here: anthropomorphists) were preying on the minds of those who are weak, to the point that entered in their souls dangerous illusions as if this was actually what the master of the Prophets came with, when [the anthropomorphists] talked about the meanings of those things which first come to the mind when this is actually the opposite of what came from God and disbelief in what is compulsory to believe about Him, it became an obligation for scholars to clarify the issue, and they have stood by what was obligatory upon them at the time, and let's thank Allah for the two groups and their work, and may Allah grant them a lot of good deeds.[27]

Here we can see the attempts of scholars to explain more clearly and justify the two positions of the *Salaf* and *Khalaf*, and why these two positions are not contradictory. In simple terms, it equates to saying that had the scholars of the *Salaf* been alive during the times and societies that the scholars of the *Khalaf* found themselves in, they would most probably have interpreted in detail, just the way the *Khalaf* scholars did, because it was the prevalent condition of their societies which pushed those scholars

to act in such a way, and not a willingness to contradict their predecessors.

al-Dusuqi

Ibrahim al-Dusuqi, who was the minister in charge of the Awqaf in Egypt, said, in an opus of the magazine of al-Azhar dedicated to the verse which contains the phrase '*al-Rahman 'ala l-'Arsh istawa*' [Q 20:5] and the sayings of Muslim scholars about the ambiguous verses:

> The scholars – both the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* – have agreed upon the exemption of God from what is literal and leads to anthropomorphism (*tashbih*) as they have agreed upon the belief in what has been confirmed from it and that this came from God. They diverged in terms of giving a specific meaning or rather, making no specification.
>
> The *Salaf* were leaving the meaning to God according to the meaning that He willed, after having believed in it and having freed God from what is literal and impossible. Ibn Hajar says, in *al-Fath al-Bari*, that this was the case of Imam Malik, al-Thawri, ibn 'Uyayna, al-Awza'i, Abu Hanifa, al-Shafi'i and of Ibn Hanbal. And this is the saying of the people of the first three centuries. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan [ash-Shaybani] said: 'The scolars of the East and of the West have agreed in the belief in the Qur'an and the confirmed *hadith* from the Prophet may Allah have mercy upon him about the attributes of the Lord, without anthropomorphism and without exegesis (*tafsir*).'[28]

In the second part of the same magazine, he adds:

> It becomes clear that the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* have agreed upon [at least] a general interpretation, as they both leave

out what is literal from the text and which would be impossible for Him the Exalted, but they differed afterwards about specifying a meaning for that particular text or not.[29]

Therefore, al-Dusuqi reminds the reader that literal meanings are not accepted by the *Salaf*. Here, again, this was the main point agreed upon by all the major Sunni scholars since the end of the *Salaf* period.

Diyab

'Abd al-Qadir 'Isa Diyab was a Syrian scholar from Aleppo who wrote the thesis from which the following extract is taken. It was written in 1978 to gain a degree in Sharia Law and was finally published in 2008. The book is presented as a scholarly refutation of a book by a Muhammad Ahmad 'Abd al-Salam, whom we understand was considered a Wahhabi by Diyab. There are several core themes of Wahhabi teachings tackled in the book, but the one that is given most prominence is the issue of anthroporphism. The editor introduces us to the book by saying that he found it timely to print because of the teachings of the current 'Wahhabis and the claimants to the Salafiyya'[30] ('al-*Wahhabiyyun wa ad'iat al-Salafiyya*').

> At-Tirmidhi said, about the *hadith* which would literally mean that 'Allah accepts honesty and takes it with His right hand': 'More than one scholar said about this *hadith* and what is like it: believe in it, do not imagine [things], and do not ask "how"'. Similarly, it has been narrated from Malik, Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna, and Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak that they were teaching, about those *hadiths*: 'We go through them without a how', and this is also the saying of the people of knowledge among *Ahlu s-sunnah wa l-jama'a* from *Jami' al-Tirmidhi* vol 3 page 24 and we [i.e., Diyab] say that this is the way of the majority of the *Salaf*, but we do not say 'of all of them' because it has reached us that some of the scholars of

that time did interpret those texts, and here are some of those interpretations [he then quotes some detailed interpretations from scholars of the *Salaf*].[31]

Diyab clarifies here that there are detailed interpretations that have been narrated from scholars of the *Salaf*.

Ibn Marzuq (d.1970)

The *Ash'ari* Abu Hamid ibn Marzuq said:

> The creed of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, may Allah *ta'ala* raise his rank, about the ambiguous texts that have reached us from the book of Allah *ta'ala* and from what has been confirmed as an authentic *sunnah*, is similar to the creed of the imams of *ijtihad* and of the *Salaf* they would interpret in detail verses such as those whose apparent meaning is that God comes, that He would be with us, or that the Black stone would be His right hand on earth, and they would leave the knowledge of what they did not explain in detail to Allah *ta'ala*, while exempting Him from any resemblance to the creations.[32]

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's creed is mentioned here to specifically target the Wahhabis who claim to be following him. Here Ibn Marzuq considers it certain that the imams of the *Salaf* did allow interpretation in some cases.

Ibn 'Ashur (d.1973)

The North African scholar Muhammad Fadil ibn 'Ashur, who was from a well-established family of scholars and a scholar in his own right, said:

> And His [ie Allah's] saying '*man fi al-sama*' in both cases [referring to a previous explanations he has made] is among

the type of *mutashabih* verses which, if taken literally, give a meaning of being limited to a place (*al-hulul fi-makan*), and this does not befit God [*man fi al-sama* literally means 'the one who is in the sky']. Thus we approach this verse, like those which are similar to it, with two ways: the *tafwid* (to leave the meaning to God) by the *Salaf* and the *ta'wil* (detailed interpretation) by the *Khalaf*, may Allah bless them all.[33]

This paragraph by al-Ashur shows that from various sections of the Muslim community, the understanding of this issue was the one that emerged as dominant since the end of the first three centuries.

al-Harari al-Habashi (d.2008)

'Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi was a contemporary scholar writing from an *Ash'ari* background. The book from which these lines are taken contains ample details of the method of the *Salaf* concerning the ambiguous verses. He is famous for his antagonism towards Wahhabism.[34] He explains, in his book *Sharh al-Qawim*, about the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an:

Here there are two ways, each of them being correct. The first of them is the way of the *Salaf*, who are the people of the first three centuries, and what is meant here is the way of most of them: they used to interpret [the ambiguous verses] in general, believing in them, and with the belief that they are not among the attributes of the body, but that they had meanings that are suitable to His majesty and His greatness but without any specification, but they refer those verses to the explicit verses such as '*Laysa kamithlihi shay*". This is as Imam al-Shafi'i, may Allah reward him, used to say: 'I believe in what came from Allah according to what Allah willed, and in what Prophet Muhammad came with,

according to what the Prophet intended' i.e., not according to what the imaginations and the assumptions may lean towards in terms of physical senses and corporeal meanings all of which are not permissible with regards to God.

As for negating detailed interpretations from the *Salaf*, as is now claimed by some, it is rejected, as there is, in Sahih al-Bukhari, in the book entitled *'Tafsir al-Qur'an wa 'ibaratih'* [i.e., Exegesis of the Qur'an and its expressions], *surat al-Qasas*, verse: *'kullu halikun illa wajhah'* [the literal meaning of which is 'everything will be destroyed except His face'], he said 'except His Sovereignty' and it was said 'what does not . . .' The sovereignty of God is one of His eternal attributes which is not like the possession which He gave to the creations. And there is [in this same chapter] other than that in terms of *ta'wil*, like the term *'dahk'* which is narrated in a *hadith*, [which is interpreted by] His mercy.[35]

After quoting other detailed interpretations, such as the one narrated from Imam Ahmad, he explains the second way:

The second way is the way of the *Khalaf*: they used to interpret in detail, by specifying meanings for [those verses] in accordance with the Arabic language, and they were not taking the apparent meanings, just as the *Salaf* did not either.[36]

al-Buti (d.2013)

Among the recent personalities who hold similar views as expressed in this section, there is al-Buti. He explained, in his landmark book targeting the Salafists (translation adapted from Sunni Publications):

The obligatory way to proceed is either to explain these words according to their external meanings which conform

with Allah's transcendence above any like or partner, and this includes not explaining them as bodily appendages and other corporeal imagery. Therefore it will be said, for example: He has [performed *istiwa*] Himself over the Throne as He has said, with an [*istiwa*] which befits His majesty and oneness; and He has a [*yad*] as He has said, which befits His divinity and majesty; etc.

Or they can be explained figuratively according to the correct rules of language and in conformity with the customs of speech in their historical context. For example: the establishment is the conquering (*istila'*) and dominion (*tasallut*), Allah's [*yad*] is His strength in His saying: 'Allah's [*yad*] is over their hand' (48:10) and His generosity in His saying: 'Nay, both His [*yadayy*] are spread wide, and He bestows as He wills' (5:64). [Ibn al-Jawzi interpreted the former verse as Allah's favor (*ni'ma*) and power (*qudra*), and the latter, according to Hasan al-Basri, as His kindness and goodness.]

Now, to proceed to any one of these two types of commentary is not devoid of interpretation (*ta'wil*) in either case. However, the first type of commentary is a non-specific interpretation, while the second is a specific interpretation.[37]

He explains that even when they refused to give a specific meaning to ambiguous religious texts, the scholars of the *Salaf* were in a way interpreting, and therefore it is not possible to say that they had never interpreted when discarding the literal meaning is a form of non-specific interpretation. He also adds, as a strong refutation of the Salafists:

That is the question in which those who stubbornly claim for themselves the name of '*salafi*' differ with us, substituting their purported affiliation with the pious *Salaf*, to the Method (*manhaj*) upon whose perfection in

every single doctrinal principle and juridical method there is complete and general agreement. The bases of their claim against us are, first, that the *Salaf* of this Community, who are the best of Muslims, showed no tendency for specific interpretation whatsoever, nor added anything beyond what Allah established for Himself in those texts, together with His transcendence above all that does not befit His lordship and divinity and loftiness above any kind of partner or rival. And the second of their proofs against us is that any inroad one makes into the words whose lexical sense Allah has linked to Himself, any probing of their import as figures, or metaphors, or similitudes, is necessarily, in one way or another, a form of divestiture (*ta'til*)!

We say, relying upon Allah for our success, that we consider neither one of the above two proofs binding upon us, for they are both unacceptable and inapplicable, and because they are not real, unlike what they imagined. For it is not true that none of the *Salaf* tended to apply specific interpretation in commenting on the verses of the divine attributes; and even if we were to suppose hypothetically that that were true, it is not true that interpreting these attributes in conformity with the principles of religion and the rules of the Arabic language, and in accordance with their Qur'anic contexts, constitutes a form of divestiture.[38]

Al-Buti does not accept any of the reasonings of the Salafists as convincing. He rejects their claim according to which no scholar of the *Salaf* ever undertook a detailed interpretation, or that interpreting would equate with negating the religious texts.

All these quotes exemplify the consensus that existed in the Sunni world about the *Salaf*'s position regarding the ambiguous verses in a stronger and more detailed fashion than before. This,

as a result of the rise of Wahhabism, led to an influx in the market of books containing a very different description of the Islamic creed to what was previously known. Sunni scholars not claiming to be Salafis but still considering themselves as following the *Salaf*'s teachings nowadays, are very much in a defensive position whereby they have to respond to the constant attacks against them made by the vocal minority of Salafists.

Recent opposition to this consensus

When Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab preached, the main aspect developed in his letters and books is without a doubt the issue of the so-called grave and saint worshipping he accused his contemporaries of, and not how to understand the issue of the Attributes of God. However, it cannot be said that this is a theme that was not in his teachings, as he ends his *Kitab al-Tawhid* with a series of ambiguous *hadiths* whose authority is not established and which he does not explain, suggesting that God would have a right hand, and fingers. In his grandson's commentary of that book, one can see that the understanding of the verses on the Attributes of God was literal and against interpretation, as explained in the previous chapter. Studying how the position of the *Salaf* on the Attributes of God was perceived after the rise of Wahhabism will enable us to assess whether anything has changed compared to the time before it appeared.

For this part, the sources chosen are mainly drawn from the twentieth century (many of the authors are still alive) and from individuals of various backgrounds, with one common point: their claim to the *Salaf*. The use of websites in this section is sometimes justified by the fact that literature of some of the most extreme factions is accessible only on the internet, and sometimes because the website reinforces what is available in print (as in the case of salafipublications.com).

Additional information on excerpts

This is a presentation of the sources of excerpts used in this chapter:

– The knowledge base contained in websites such as
salafipublications.com, alhawali.com, islamtoday.net and the
page entitled *Minbar al-Tawhid wa l-Jihad*. These are websites
which gather information on related issues by current shaykhs
in Saudi Arabia (and, for Minbar al-Tawhid wa l-Jihad, outside
Saudi Arabia). Salafipublications.com is a conservative website
which could be identified as the voice of official Salafists in
English on the web. Alhawali.com and islamtoday.net are
maintained by the so-called *Sahwi* shaykhs, that is, reformists,
who had been jailed between 1994 and 1999, but who are
today more cooperative with the official Saudi clergy since
their release.[39] Minbar al-Tawhid wa l-Jihad contains a lot of
material written by extremist groups, calling for what they
have defined as a *jihad* and used to be a major literary resource
for Arabic-speaking extremists.

– *Tanbihat fi al-radd ʿala man taʾawwala al-Sifat* by Ibn Baz
(d.1999), former influential cleric who held the post of Grand
Mufti of Saudi Arabia and various other prestigious positions
in the Kingdom. He is one of the main references of most of
the Salafists. The whole book is dedicated to proving that the
verses dealing with the Attributes of God should not be
interpreted.

– *al-Muntaqa*,[40] a three-volume book gathering the main *fatwas*
of Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan (b.1933). A former student of
Ibn Baz, al-Fawzan is a member of the Saudi instance known as
the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Fatawa.
The first volume, which contains the material that will be used
here, is dedicated to the creed. Al-Fawzan has denounced the
definition of the position of the *Salaf* and criticized al-Buti's
book mentioned in the previous section. Extracts from his

article on the subject, entitled '*Nadharat wa ta'liqat 'ala ma fi kitab al-Salafiyya min al-hafuwat*' ('Insights and comments into the idiocies of Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan contained in his book '*al-Salafiyya*'), will also be used.[41]

– *I'lam al-mu'asirin*[42] by Muhammad Salih ibn al-'Uthaymin (d.2001), one of the pillars of the WSNS trend in the twentieth century. He lectured in Mecca for over 35 years and was a member of the Council of Senior Scholars of Saudi Arabia. There are also extracts of an English website dedicated to him which contain many of his sayings on different issues.[43]

The methodology is the same, regardless of which faction of Salafism these authors belong to: they deny that the scholars of the *Salaf* ever interpreted any ambiguous verses. In addition, they might not even count the verses on the Attributes of God as ambiguous verses in any case,[44] then they heavily criticise the twofold division into a way of the *Salaf* and one for the *Khalaf*, both of which do not rely on the literal meaning. Ibn Baz even claims he had never heard of such a twofold position before reading it in al-Sabuni's works. The common feature of those critics is that they equate interpreting with negating. Then, when they think they have proven that interpreting is only negating under another name, they only deal with negating, which is indeed considered a heresy in Islam. Most of the literature in this section is based on the premise that interpreting a term from the religious texts equates negating that God has an attribute. What looks like a misunderstanding at first, is actually a clear strategy to not try to understand the position of the adversary. As with Abu Ya'ala before them, misrepresenting the position of the opponent is a strategy used constantly by those aforementioned authors.

Ibn Baz (d.1999)

His book on the issue is conceived as a refutation against Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni, a Syrian scholar who wrote several

articles dealing with the issue of the Attributes of God and how best to understand them. Referring to where al-Sabuni distinguished between 'the way of the *Salaf*' and 'the way of the *Khalaf*' regarding the Attributes of God, Ibn Baz asserts:

> This is a wrong division, nobody preceded him [al-Sabuni] in saying so, as far as I know, as indeed the way of '*Ahlu l-Sunnah*' is only one and this is the one of the Companions of the Prophet – peace be upon him – and of their followers, and it consists in confirming the names and attributes of God, and to go through them as they came, and the belief that they are the truth and that Allah, exalted be He, is attributed with them according to the meaning which is suitable for His majesty, without any distortion, without any negation, without specifying a 'how', without resemblance and without interpreting them with other than their apparent meaning, and without *tafwid* [i.e., leaving the meaning to God]. Rather they believed in their known meanings, that they are a truth suitable for Allah exalted be He and that He does not resemble His creations in anything.
>
> And the *madhhab* of the *khalaf* contradicts this as can be known by reading the sayings of these ones and the sayings of those ones. Then he [al-Sabuni] said that *Ahl al-Sunnah* have left the knowledge of the meaning of those attributes to God and he repeated this out of context, and he made a mistake in this, and he attributed to them what they are innocent of, as we mentioned earlier from what was narrated by the sayings of *shaykh al-Islam* Ibn Taymiyya may Allah have mercy upon him from the group of *Ahlu s-Sunnah* may Allah have mercy upon them: indeed *Ahl al-Sunna* left the knowledge of the 'how' to God, not the knowledge of the meaning, as we mentioned earlier.[45]

The part where he affirms that nobody preceded al-Sabuni in making this division is surprising, considering what has been mentioned before on this issue in the previous chapter. Even Ibn Taymiyya said that this claim was 'all over their tongues and books' talking about the *Ash'aris*, as mentioned above.[46] Ibn Baz tries to make this division appear as if it was made up by al-Sabuni when al-Sabuni only reiterated what we have proved was said by a majority of Sunni scholars before him. This appears to be a deliberate move to dupe people into thinking that this is a relatively unknown notion. It is highly unlikely that somebody like Ibn Baz, with the level of knowledge that his positions entailed, would be ignorant of this definition of Sunni scholars of there being two ways to understand the ambiguous verses, when in the previous section we have seen that this was considered a consensus (i.e. not to take the literal meanings of those texts), and confirmed by Ibn Taymiyya himself.

Muhammad al-'Uthaymin (d.2001)

In a pamphlet entitled 'The Muslims' Belief' and distributed free to pilgrims from all over the world during the Hajj, among other occasions, al-'Uthaymin states (translation by Maneh Al-Johani, as found on the website):

> We believe it is obligatory to take the texts of the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions conceding Allah's Attributes at their face value and to interpret them in a way that is suitable to Almighty Allah. We reject the practice of those who twist the meanings of these texts and understand them in a way that was not intended by Allah and His messenger.
>
> We also reject the practice of those who make them devoid of their meanings as conveyed by Allah and His Messenger. Finally, we reject the approach of those who exaggerate, who gave them a physical interpretation that makes Allah similar to some of His creatures.[47]

Here, 'twisting the meanings' is what others call 'interpreting'. There is a deliberate attempt not to leave room for an interpretation which would be coherent with the text and the meanings of the terms of the interpreted phrase.

This is even clearer later, where he explains how one should understand the *istiwa* of God on the Throne, which the *Ash'aris* explains as a 'domination' of the Throne and not of actually being established over it, per se. He says:

> His 'settling on the throne' means that He is sitting in person on His throne in a way that is becoming to His majesty and greatness. Nobody except He knows exactly how He is sitting.[48]

Salafists can only envisage taking the texts according to their literal meaning or negating them. The way chosen by some scholars to give detailed interpretation of those ambiguous verses and *hadith* does not find its place in this representation.

al-Fawzan (b.1933)

In a treatise that is edited just after the *Tanbihat* of Ibn Baz, Salih al-Fawzan also condemns this division. He says:

> To say that the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* was *tafwid* is a wrong attribution and an ignorance of the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*, as the *Salaf* did not leave the meaning to God, because the meaning was known to them, but they left the meaning of the 'how' to God.[49]

He also says, referring to where traditional Sunni scholars say that there is no contradiction between the two approaches of both the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf*:

> We say that if the *madhhab* of both of them was one, then why do you divide them into *salaf* and *khalaf*? And if the *madhhab*

of both factions are different, as it appears clearly, then it is not valid, in language, in law, and according to the mind, to bring together into one group under this heading and to call them both '*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-jama'a*', when the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunna* is as the Prophet mentioned it 'those who are upon what is similar to what I and my companions are upon today' so was the interpretation of the attributes that was done by the *khalaf*, as you yourself mentioned about them, among the things that the Prophet and his companions were upon? Therefore the one who interprets the attributes is not from *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a* in this regard, even if he is among them for other issues where they do not contradict them.[50]

Here, al-Fawzan is suggesting that if both approaches were correct, then there would be no need to divide them into two ways, rather there would just be one way which is correct. This argument is showing that the Salafists are not willing to engage in subtleties of explanations or refined theories: al-Fawzan here sounds as if he is saying, 'if there is one correct way, then you cannot say there are two. That alone proves you wrong', which seems a simplistic argument. He also excludes from *Ahl al-Sunna* all those who interpret the ambiguous verses.[51]

In the following excerpt, al-Fawzan finds it hard to say that scholars who delve into interpreting could be considered as believing in the Attributes of God 'without negation':

His [al-Sabuni] saying that they were all believing in the attributes of Allah *ta'ala* without negation or resemblance contains an ambiguity: as how can it be said that the one who interprets the attributes of God away from their proper meaning and who then interpret *yad* by power, *istawa* by control, *rahmah* by favour, how can it be said, in spite of that, that they believe in those attributes without negation? Isn't this act the very meaning of negating?[52]

This reasoning is exactly the way the argument of the Salafists is usually presented: that the *Ash'aris* are people who negate the religious dogma, who do not accept what is mentioned in the Qur'an. This is the case so that the one who was not previously familiar with the *Ash'aris* can only detest everything about them, as negating any part of the Qur'an is traditionally considered in Islam to be heresy.

As for the narrations according to which some scholars of the *Salaf* did make interpretations of some verses of the Qur'an, al-Fawzan does not deny them, but he says that he does not classify them as interpretations. He justifies:

> As for the quotes that you mentioned among the exegesis of *Ahl al-sunna wa l-jama'a* about the verses, saying that this was in the sense that His knowledge and that He encompasses everything is not an interpretation, as you claimed [here he is a referring to the interpretation of 'God is with us' and of 'and He encompasses everything' by 'God is with us by His knowledge', made by *Ash'ari* scholars, and with which Salafists are also in agreement, although here they deny it to be an interpretation].[53]

According to him, interpreting is nothing short of misguidance:

> Yes we judge as misguided the one who interprets the attributes of God against what is indicated to him and tries to give it other than its real meaning among the *Ash'aris* and other than them. If this is not misguidance then what is misguidance?[54]

The fact that a majority of Muslim scholars throughout history held the view that interpreting was allowed and even performed by the *Salaf*, means that the Salafists consider misguided most of those figures who had so far been considered major references of the Sunnis.

al-Hawali (b.1954)

Safar al-Hawali is a Saudi preacher who completed his doctoral work at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca under the Egyptian Muhammad Qutb (d.2014), brother of the controversial Sayyid Qutb (d.1966) and main link between the Egyptian Brotherhood and the Saudi Wahhabis. He spent several years in prison due to his militantism and was warned against by no other than al-Fawzan at several occasions. However, in terms of creed, there is no major difference between the two. Regarding the method of the *Salaf* concerning the Attributes of God, he, like Ibn Baz, denies that anybody from the *Salaf* ever made an interpretation of any kind:

> Here it is compulsory to confirm once again that the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is not the interpretation of any text from the texts of the Islamic law ever, and one cannot find a single text, about the attributes of any other subject showing that the *Salaf* would have interpreted, and to Allah is the praise.[55]

He concludes by adding:

> Why did the *Ash'aris* declare as non-Muslims the *Baatinis* (from derogating to the apparent meaning of some verses) when they actually share with them one of their strongest fundamentals [the permissibility of making interpretations]?[56]

For al-Hawali, to consider interpretations permissible is in itself a deviation which makes the *Ash'aris* similar to factions which had been denounced as heretical.

al-'Awda (b.1955)

Salman al-'Awda is another ex-opponent to the Saudi regime now freed from jail and co-opted by the official clergy. In the website

that he manages, there are many questions on the issue of the ambiguous verses answered by teachers of the Imam al-Sa'ud University or of al-Qasim University.[57] For example, one of the contributors to the websites asserts:

> The people of knowledge have narrated that the imams of the *Salaf* used to declare as non-Muslims all those who deny the *'uluww* of Allah *ta'ala* as is confirmed in the books of the *Salaf* related to the creed, and may the one who has a sound mind ask for [God's] assistance (answered by the director of the department of *'aqidah* of Umm al-Qura University, Dr Su'ud ibn Abd al-Aziz al-'Arifi).[58]

This answer is typical of the Salafists discourse: although the *Ash'aris* have never denied the *'uluww* (in its Arabic form, literally translated as: physical elevation) of God which is mentioned in the religious texts, the Salafists will refer to sayings of well-known scholars condemning those who deny any of the Attributes of God. This is why the first stage of their argument consists in equating interpreting and negating, so that they are then able to bring up quotes from famous figures not against interpretation, but against negating the Attributes of God.

al-Khudayri

Interpreting is consistently portrayed as a negation of the religious texts, illustrated clearly by this answer from a member of the teaching body of the al-Saud University, Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Khudayri:

> Distorting is changing, and changing can be a change in the words, like when they say that the saying of Allah *'ar-Rahman 'ala l-'arsh istawa'* and then they say: "*istawa* is *istawla*"[59] and also – in changing the case ending of the Majestic name of God 'Allah' in His saying *'wa kallama*

Allahu Musa taklima' where the case ending [of the word Allah] is changed from nomination to accusative [i.e., the verse would read '*wa kallama Allaha Musa taklima'* [so as to mean that Musa spoke to God instead of 'God certainly spoke to Musa'].[60]

It should be noted here that it is not part of *Ash'ari* teachings to say that a word or even a vowel from the Qur'an should be changed. If anything, it is mentioned in their books that advocating a change in even one letter of the Qur'an is blasphemy.[61]

al-Dumayji

Dr Abdullah ibn 'Umar al-Dumayji, a member of the teaching staff of Umm al-Qura, when asked if there was an attribute such as place confirmed about Allah, answers:

> As for confirming or negating the time and place about Allah, these are words which trigger imagination and which can carry both the truth and what is incorrect, and it is the habit of *Ahl al-Sunna* with such words which trigger the imagination and which are inclusive [of both good and bad] not to refute them in an absolute way, and not to confirm them in an absolute way.[62]

The same argument is used to say that the *Salaf* would have never confirmed or negated a body to Allah in an answer given by Abd al-Rahman ibn Nasir al-Barrak, a member of the teaching staff of the University al-Sa'ud. He says that 'it is not permissible to count these particular words [i.e., 'body'] as Attributes of God whether to negate it or confirm it'.[63]

'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Khaliq (b.1939)

'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Khaliq, an Egyptian-born preacher educated in Saudi Arabia and who is now based in

Kuwait, wrote an article entitled '*al-Radd 'ala Man ankara Tawhid al-Asma wa l-Sifat*' (which means 'The Refutation Aagainst the One who Denies the Oneness [of God] in the Names and Attributes'). He explains:

> To negate one of the confirmed attributes of God is unbelief:
>
> The scholars of the *Salaf* have considered a disbeliever the one who negates one of the confirmed attributes of Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* whatever that attribute is, as did Khalid ibn 'Abd Allah al-Qasri the Amir of Wasit when al-Ja'ad ibn Darham negated the attributes of '*hubb*' and '*makhalah*' about Allah *tabaraka wa ta'ala*. So he [Khalid ibn Abd Allah] killed him in front of the people the day of [Eid] al-Adha, by saying: 'O you people, make your sacrifices, and may Allah accept your sacrifices, as far as I am concerned my sacrifice is *Ja'ad* because he claimed that Allah did not take Ibrahim as His *khalil*.' And also: Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal declared as a blasphemer Jahm ibn Safwan and among his problems, was that he was negating the attribute of '*Uluww*' to Allah *tabaraka wa ta'ala* and he wrote his famous letter *al-Radd 'ala al-Zanadiqa* therefore calling those who negate the attribute of *al-'Uluww* as perverse people. As for Imam Abu Hanifa, he was among the strongest ones of all in terms of declaring as blasphemers those who negate the attributes of God.[64]

Here, it appears that a divergence of understanding of the Attributes of God can lead to one being executed. He also adds:

> As for the one who used *ta'wil*, he is excused according to Allah, if he is among the Muslim scholars and among those who are looking for the truth and who run towards it. As for the rest of us, we are not excused if the truth has been

exposed to us and we leave it, following such and such person.[65]

This is his way of dealing with the fact that most of the Sunni scholars did interpret; he solves the issue by saying that those scholars will be forgiven by Allah but that ordinary Muslims doing the same will not. This is a rather convoluted argument to make.

IS literature

IS have also released a statement on the creed that they are upon, which has been translated and annotated by Aymenn Jawad. The inclusion of IS here, even though it is refuted by the two previous factions of Salafists, is because they, too, claim to be the inheritors of the teachings of Muhammad ibn Al-Wahhab, whom they cite with reverence and respect in several copies of their magazine *Dabiq*.[66] They prefer to be called *muwahidun* (upholders of the Oneness of God) as opposed to *Salafis*. However, they do share the version of history of today's Salafists. *Muwahidun* was also the preferred name of the followers of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. They say:

> He is the First, the Last, the Exterior and the Interior ('there is nothing like Him, and He is the Hearer, the Seer'). And we do not commit heresy against the Almighty's names or the Exalted's qualities, but we affirm them for Him just as they came in the Book and authentic *Sunna* without *takyif*, *tamthil*, *ta'wil* or *ta'til*.[67]

Here, it is the end of the sentence that indicates their position. By negating *tamthil* (making god resembling His creations) and *ta'wil* at the same time, they are in the exact same position as the other branches of Salafism in terms of their understanding of how the Attributes of God should be understood.

Abdullah al-Faisal, a supporter of IS

Another source can be found in the teachings of Abdullah al-Faisal, a Jamaican cleric who is a graduate of Imam Saud University in Riyadh and close to the banned al-Muhajirun group. He used to preach in the United Kingdom until he was convicted in 2003 for soliciting murder and inciting racial hatred, and sentenced to nine years in prison, reduced to seven in 2004. After having been released on parole after serving half of his sentence, he was deported to Jamaica in May 2007. He currently resides in Jamaica, where he has been banned from lecturing in any of the 12 mosques of the island. Therefore, he currently delivers lectures on the social platform Paltalk twice a day. Many of his lectures are then typed up by some of his students and put online on his dedicated website. A twitter account also sends reminders and announcements about the classes.

After the 13 November 2015 attacks in Paris, he gave a lecture on 14 November, which starts by stating that the French are, as a society, 'breathtakingly evil'. He carefully frames his sentences to say that he does not justify the attacks and simply explains them. For example, he says 'Do you know why ISIS kills innocents? Do you know why? Because of a *fatwa* they took a *fatwa* from 'Uthaymin. They took it from 'Uthaymin, not directly from his works, his writings. 'Uthaymin passed a *fatwa* before he died. What did he say? If the *kuffar* should kill your innocents (men, women and children), then you are allowed to kill their innocents to take revenge'.[68]

In his series of lectures called 'Let's call a spade a spade', Part 2, he says, in notes typed up by one of his students:

> The *Ashaa'ira* has [sic] *kufr* and *shirk* on their minds. If their hearts and minds were pure they would believe that Allah has two hands. But they don't resemble our hands. But because their hearts and minds are corrupted, they make Allah similar to His creation. And as a result deny His 99

names and attributes. The *Ashaa'ira* claim Allah is everywhere in person. We say to them, you are insulting Allah with this claim. Because some places are holy and other places are unholy. To say Allah is everywhere in person, you are insulting Him with your claim. We say to them, you claim to be *Hanifs* [sic], *Malikis* and *Shafis*. None of these great Imams (rh) claimed Allah is everywhere.[69]

In Part 4, he quotes al-Uthaymin and says:

The Prophet's words, 'Adam was created in His image' means that Allah created Adam in His image, for He has a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot, and Adam had a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot (. . .) but that does not mean that these things are exactly the same. There is some similarity, but it is not exactly the same. Similarly, the first group to enter Paradise are likened to the moon, but they are not exactly the same. This confirms the view of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah*, who say that none of the attributes of Allaah can be likened to the attributes of created beings, without distorting or misinterpreting, or discussing how or likening Him to His creation.[70]

The distortion of the opponents' arguments here is obvious, as *Ash'aris* do not teach that Allah is everywhere in person. He accuses the *Ash'aris* of having a creed that they do not have. He also condemns clearly the interpretation of verses pertaining to the Attributes of God.

This chapter has established that the arguments used nowadays by both groups in favour or opposed to the consensus on the position of the *Salaf* scholars on the Attributes of God, are strikingly similar to the terms of the debate that took place in the Middle Ages. The position of the Salafists on the interpretation of the ambiguous verses has prompted contemporary defenders

of the *Ash'ari* school to write refutations against what they perceive as a misguidance. The consequence of this Salafist's stance on the interpretation of the ambiguous verse has impacted their version of history and has led them to define Sunnism in a new fashion.

CHAPTER 5

A VISION OF HISTORY OPPOSED TO SUNNI ISLAM

The most famous aspect of the creed as advocated by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, is his rejection of the worshipping of tombs and saints he deemed his contemporaries guilty of. He deemed it *shirk*, therefore considering that any person going to a grave to seek blessings or saying 'O Muhammad' (*Ya Muhammad*) would become a blasphemer.[1] This part of his teachings is well-known, and is to be found in every study on the movement. He is understood to have taken this idea from Ibn Taymiyya, whose works he apparently copied.[2] Delong-Bas contests this, but with no serious foundation.[3]

This point of the teachings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is the only recurrent feature all commentators seem to agree on when it comes to describing what Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab believed in. However, there is more disagreement amongst researchers on what the rest of his religious teachings were. For example, when some authors explain that Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab did not totally reject the four schools. They say he encouraged people to judge for themselves whatever is said by a *mujtahid* scholar, by looking at the Qur'an and the Sunnah.[4] Some others deny that this was ever an issue for the movement, as its members claim to be *Hanbali*.[5] Concerning this issue, Dallal summarises it as follows:

> His [Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's] opposition to
> *taqlid* is used only to undermine traditional authority, and is
> not contrasted with its logical opposite, *ijtihad*.[6]

Indeed, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab is not famous for having
left a legacy of how to perform *ijtihad*.

In addition, there are some other aspects of his teachings which
are developed by some authors and ignored by others, the main
one being anthropomorphism, which is to attribute humanly
attributes to God.[7] Although the fact that Muhammad ibn 'Abd
al-Wahhab attributes human attributes to God came first in the
ten-point list of Margoliouth concerning the creed of the
Wahhabis in his entry on Wahhabism in the Encyclopedia of
Religion and Ethics, this information is not studied in numerous
writers' articles. Margoliouth states:

> They regard the Deity as having bodily form, with face,
> hands, etc.[8]

Very little has been written on this particular subject, when it is
one of the key elements of the Sunni creed (as presented by the
authors who wrote heresiographical books, as seen in Chapter 1)
that God does not resemble His creation in any way. Even some
of the most in-depth scholarly studies on Wahhabism do not
account for the problem posed by Wahhabism in terms of the
definition and comprehension of God and His Attributes.[9]
What we are interested in here is one aspect of the religious
doctrine of Wahhabism, as there are some fundamentals that all
Salafists rely upon without fail, whether they now condemn
violence or not: the belief in the Attributes of God. This will be
the focus of the next section of this book: how contemporary
Wahhabi discourse has brought the issue of the Attributes of
God and their understanding to the fore, and the consequences
stemming from this.

There is an aspect which is central to the thought of all the groups affiliating themselves to Salafism nowadays, one way or another, and that is their very specific vision of history. This vision is, in every aspect, opposed to that of Sunni Islam, as usually defined. They already offer to the world a pre-Wahhabi/post-Wahhabi narrative to the world. However, there is one pivotal concept which needs to be studied in order to better contextualise the decisions and outlook on life that the Salafists have and which is their account of what Sunnism, or 'proper Islam' has been until today. That is their vision of history. What is termed here 'a vision of history is how the Salafists perceive the Islamic history and the establishment of orthodoxy in Islam throughout the centuries. It will be argued here that their perception is different from the one which has, so far, been widely accepted by Sunni scholars.

Today, the notion of 'Sunnism' is highly debated by concerned protagonists, although it has been hinted at in the writings of French-speaking Redissi and Vernochet, for example.[10] The narrative of what Sunnism is and has been being profoundly changed as a result of the rewriting of history that is being made by the Salafists.

So far, academic literature, as well as mainstream Islamic institutions, acknowledge that the theological framework of the vast majority of Muslims in the world was *Ash'aris*m.[11] As explained in Chapter 1, *Ash'aris*m is the name given to the theological school originally based on al-Ash'ari's teachings to provide proofs based on textual evidence from the Qur'an and the *hadith*, as well as on rational arguments.[12] Before detailing how the vision upheld by the Salafists differs from the hitherto-known definition of Sunnism, we need to explain the latter concept.

The 'traditional' vision of Islamic history

Here, the term 'traditional' is used to refer to the vision of Islamic history that has been circulated widely and accepted, so far, by the

majority of the Sunnis. The three main points of this vision are: the importance of belonging to one of two main theological schools and to one of four main legal schools, the notion of continuity, and the significance of numeric superiority.

Two theological schools, four legal schools

The leading vision of history concerning Sunnism was that there were two main imams who vindicated the creed of the majority of the Muslims against several opponents in the early centuries. These were: Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d.935) and Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi (d.944). They both held the belief of the *Salaf* (whom they are considered a part of, as they were born before the end of the third century) and managed to win the battle against the deviant groups which innovated alternative tenets of faith. Later, when they established themselves in different parts of the world, scholars would adhere to one of these schools and be, therefore, either *Ash'ari* or *Maturidi*, as far as theology is concerned.[13] This traditional vision ('traditional' here in the meaning that it was upheld by a whole array of Muslim scholars[14] and by academics)[15] is, today, the vision of history of those that will be referred to, for the purpose of this book, the Sunnis. The Sunnis consider themselves inheritors of the *Salaf*, but they do not call themselves Salafis.

According to this vision, there is no real difference, in terms of creed, between al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi. The main differences are terminological questions and their consequences.[16] Further-more, neither is there a difference between the creed of al-Ash'ari and/or al-Maturidi, and that of the *Salaf*, because both al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi are deemed scholars from that era (i.e., the *Salaf* period) who fought against the different innovating groups and won the battle at that time. The proponents of this vision also believe firmly that they are following in the footsteps of the *Salaf* because they are following the schools of the four imams in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). These four imams are Abu Hanifa (d.767), Malik ibn 'Anas (d.796), Muhammad Idris al-Shafi'i

(d.820) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855), and they all lived during the *Salaf* period. Sunni scholars have agreed that these four were the best at extracting religious judgements from the Qur'an and the *Sunna*.

To illustrate the importance of the two theological schools in Sunnism, we can quote

Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, quoted earlier, who said:

> The Ash'arites and Maturidites are those who have preserved and transmitted the creed of *Ahl al-Sunna*, whom the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, praised and ordered to be followed [when he said]: 'Stick to my tradition and to the tradition of the right-guided caliphs.' The Ash'arites are named after the Imam 'Ali Ibn Isma'il Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, and the Maturidites after Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. Both men are salient figures among our *Salaf*, who make the creed of the Salaf triumph, i.e. that of the people of the *Sunna*. None among them invented a new creed or a new religious school.[17]

Al-Buti notes that al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi were themselves part of the *Salaf*, and that therefore following them is part of the injunction of the Prophet to adhere to his tradition.

Mufti Ebrahim Desai, a South African Grand Mufti of Indian descent who was educated at a traditional *Dars Nizami* (*Hanafi/ Maturidi*) institution, when answering a question on what the differences between the *Ash'aris* and the Maturidis are, said:

> Imaam of the Asharites is Abul Hasan Ashari (RA) [sic] and the Imaam of the Maturidites is Abu Mansoor Maaturidi (RA) [sic]. Both were adherents of the *Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaa'*. There is no real difference in *Aqeedah* between the two. The differences are only in the different use of words and ways of interpretation. And Allah *Ta'ala* Knows Best.[18]

Desai minimises the differences between the two schools and stresses that they are both *Ahl al-Sunna*.

In an article on an exposition of who al-Ash'ari and the Ash'aris are, Gibril Fouad Haddad, a contemporary writer actively engaged in polemics with the Wahhabis online, writes:

> The *Ash'ari* scholars were foremost among those who refuted the Hashwiyya[19] from the time al-Ash'ari first appeared until that of al-Bayhaqi and Ibn 'Abd al-Salam. These *Ash'ari* scholars fought innovators by means of the pen and the tongue until they came to be known as the synonym, or rather the definition of *Ahl al-Sunna*, as described in the words of al-Bayhaqi in his letter to 'Amid al-Mulk: 'Those of the Hanafis, Malikis, and Shafi'is that do not go the way of divesting Allah of His Attributes (ta'teel) [sic] as the Mu'tazila[20] do, nor the way of likening Allah to creation (tashbeeh) as the Mujassima[21] do.' Just as the Prophet and the Companions embodied the 'Middle Community' praised by Allah in His Book (2:143), the *Ash'aris* embodied the 'Saved Group' praised by the Prophet in the *hadith* of the seventy-three sects. That is, the group that holds a middle ground between the vagaries of different heretical doctrines.[22]

Haddad stresses the importance of the role played by the *Ash'aris* in preserving and defending the Sunni creed, and quotes al-Bayhaqi (d.1066) to support his definition. There is also an article written by al-Maliki which we can quote almost in its entirety, as it contains a summary of the case for considering the *Ash'aris* as being an integral part of *Ahl al-Sunna*. Al-Maliki is the son of a well-known Maliki scholar from Mecca who used to be vocal against Wahhabism in general, and the Saudis in particular. This article, originally written in Arabic, was in a book where Al-Maliki gathered a series of articles and lectures dealing with

current issues faced by the Muslim community.[23] It was then translated into English, used here, and French, and uploaded onto various websites.[24] It is relatively lengthy, but it gives a good idea of what is at stake here in this debate. He explains:

> Many sons/daughters of Muslims are ignorant of the *Ash'ari* School, whom it represents, and its positions on the tenets of the Islamic faith (*aqidah*), and yet some of them are not God-fearing enough to refrain from accusing it of deviance, departure from the religion of Islam, and heresy about the Attributes of Allah. The ignorance of the *Ash'ari* school is a cause of rendering the unity of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, dispersing its ranks. Some have gone as far as to consider the Ash'aris among the categories of heretical sects, though it is beyond me how believers can be linked with misbelievers, or how Sunni Muslims can be considered equal with the most extreme faction of the Mu'tazilites, the Jahmites.[25]
>
> 'Shall We deal with Muslims as We do criminals? How is it that you judge?' [Qur'an 68:35–6]
>
> The Ash'aris are the Imams of the distinguished figures of guidance among the scholars of the Muslims, whose knowledge has filled the world from east to west, and whom people have unanimously concurred upon their excellence, scholarship, and religiousness. They include the first rank of Sunni scholars and the most brilliant of their luminaries, who stood in the face of the excesses commited by the Mu'tazilites, and who constitute whole sections of the foremost Imams of *Hadith*, Sacred Law, Quranic exegesis. Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad ibn Hajar 'Asqalani {emphasis not mine as for all the subsequent ones} (d.852/1449; *Rahimullah*), the mentor of *Hadith* scholars and author of the book '*Fath al-Bari bi sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*', which not a single Islamic scholar can dispense with, was *Ash'ari*. The shaykh of the scholars of Sunni Islam, Imam Nawawi

(d.676/1277; *Rahimullah*), author of '*Sharh Sahih Muslim*'
and many other famous works, was *Ash'ari*. The master of
Qur'anic exegetes, Imam Qurtubi (d.671/1273;
Rahimullah), author of '*al-Jami' li ahkan al-Qur'an*', was
Ash'ari. Shaykh al-Islam ibn Hajar Haytami (d.974/1567;
Rahimullah), who wrote '*al-Zawajir 'an iqtiraf al-kaba'ir*',
was *Ash'ari*. The Shaykh of Sacred Law and *Hadith*, the
conclusive definitive Zakariyya Ansari (d.926/1520;
Rahimullah), was *Ash'ari*. Imam Abu Bakr Baqillani
(d.403/1013; *Rahimullah*), Imam 'Asqalani; Imam Nasafi
(d.710/1310; *Rahimullah*); Imam Shirbini (d.977/1570;
Rahimullah); Abu Hayyan Tawhidi, author of the Qur'anic
commentary '*al-Bahr al-muhit*'; Imam ibn Juzayy
(d.741/1340; *Rahimullah*); author of '*al-Tashil fi 'ulum
al-Tanzil*'; and others – all of these were Imams of the
Ash'aris. If we wanted to name all of the top scholars of
Hadith, Qur'anic exegesis, and Sacred Law who were Imams
of the Ash'aris, we would be hard put to do so and would
require volumes merely to list these illustrious figures whose
wisdom has filled the earth from east to west. And it is
incumbent upon us to give credit where credit is due,
recognising the merit of those of knowledge and virtue who
have served the Sacred Law of the Greatest Messengers (Allah
bless him and grant him peace). What good is to be hoped
for us if we impugn our foremost scholars and righteous
forbearers with charges of aberrancy and misguidance? Or how
should Allah give us the benefit of their scholarship if we
believe it is deviance and departure from the way of Islam?
I ask you, is there a single Islamic scholar of the present day,
among all the PhD.s and geniuses, who has done what Ibn
Hajar 'Asqalani or Imam Nawawi have, of the service rendered
by these two noble Imams (May Allah enfold them in His
mercy and bliss) to the pure Prophetic *Sunnah*? How should
we charge them and all Ash'aris with abberancy when it is we

who are in need of their scholarship? Or how can we take knowledge from them if they were in error? For as Imam Zuhri (d.124/742; *Rahimullah*) says, 'This knowledge is religion, so look well to whom you are taking your religion from.'

Is it not sufficient for someone opposed to the Ash'aris to say, 'Allah have mercy on them, they used reasoning (*ijtihad*) in figuratively interpreting the divine attributes, which it would have been fitter for them not to do'; instead of accusing them of deviance and misguidance, or displaying anger towards whoever considers them to be of the Sunni Community? If Imams Nawawi, 'Asqalani, Qurtubi, Baqillani, al-Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Haytami, Zakariyyah Ansari, and many others were not among the most brilliant scholars and illustrious geniuses, or of the Sunni Community, then who are the Sunnis?

I sincerely entreat all who call others to this religion or who work in the field of propagating Islam to fear Allah respecting the honour of the Community of Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace) is possessed of goodness until the Final Hour, we are bereft of any if we fail to acknowledge the worth and excellence of our learned.

In conclusion, the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jama'ah* are the true followers of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) and his Companions (Allah be pleased with them all), followed by those who trod their path for the last 1400 years. It is, in summary, the followers of Imam Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'ari (*Rahimullah*) and Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (*Rahimullah*) in *Aqeedah*, and this saved sect is represented by the adherents of one of the four schools, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, today. This is the sect which has had the largest following throughout Islamic history, *as-Sawad al-Az'am*) as confirmed by the Qur'anic and *Ahadith*-based evidence and it will remain dominant until the Hour is established, inshaAllah.[26]

With this article, we can see that, for the Sunnis, the two main theological schools, as well as the four main legal ones, are central in the definition of what Sunnism is. According to them, if all the famous *Ash'ari* scholars were to be considered misguided or worse, then there will be very few personalities left to be considered as orthodox. This is a recurrent argument. Considering *Ash'aris* outside of *Ahl al-Sunna* would also go against the notion of continuity, which is the second fundamental point of this vision.

A long continuum of scholars

Another feature of this vision is the notion that there has been a continuous chain of scholars on the 'right creed' to whom Muslims are indebted today. There isn't a belief that there were gaps in Muslim history, during which it was hard to find somebody on the right path. On the contrary, it is considered that, on the whole, the teachings of the previous generations can be relied upon. A description of this notion of continuity is given by Calder:

> A commentary on a commentary on an epitome of the law – the layered glosses of the work incidentally neatly illustrate the stress on continuity, on preserving the tradition, on acknowledging diachronic continuity, which I have already identified as an essential part of the Sunni religious experience[27] (here, Calder is referring to *Hashiyat radd al-muhtar*[28] of Ibn 'Abidin, a renowned Damascene Hanafi scholar d.1842).

The author uses the physical organisation of classical works of jurisprudence to illustrate his point, that is, the fact that it was customary for scholars to add commentaries on previous scholars' works on the margin or sides of said works. He also noticed that the earlier generations of commentators are granted great

importance by Sunni scholars, to the extent that subsequent commentaries and exegeses are sometimes little more than a reminder of what those earlier scholars said. Although this might be interpreted as a lack of creativity or originality, in Sunni Islam it is considered a sign of acknowledgement of the work of preservation undertaken by earlier generations. Calder adds:

> (. . .) and there is also a tendency for Muslims not to comment directly. When a scholar writes a large *tafsir*, he explores the views of earlier authorities, including, of course, the views of the Prophet himself, the views of his Companions, the views of the next generations, until at the end, he might say 'and my view is . . .' or 'My preferred view is', thus expressing preferences within the tradition, rather than pinning down the meaning of the Qur'an.[29]

This statement will help us differentiate the vision of the Salafists from that of the Sunnis:

> (. . .) Sunni Islam is a religion in which, although everything in one sense is taken back to the scripture, in another sense it is ongoing. It is a religion which seems to demand of its participants that appropriate acknowledgement be granted to the community as it develops through time (and as it is represented by scholars) (. . .) every later statement of faith or assessment of meaning in the Qur'an takes into account the earlier statements worked out by the community.[30]

This acknowledgement is central in Sunni Islam, that is, successive generations of scholars who are considered on the right path and not misguided.[31] This notion of continuity also emerges in the articles quoted earlier, such as in al-Maliki's, when he states that:

the *Ahl al-Sunna wa l-Jama'a* are the true followers of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) and his Companions (Allah be pleased with them all), followed by those who trod their path for the last 1400 years.[32]

In every epoch of these 1400 years, it is considered that there were a plethora of scholars who were on the correct path. Not just a few, or a handful of them, but many of them: the majority of them. The high number of renowned scholars who adhered to one of the two theological schools and one of the four legal schools is deemed significant for the Sunnis.

Representing the majority of Muslims

In addition to the two major theological trends, the four schools of law and the notion of continuity, another important feature of this vision of history is the numeric superiority of its holders, which is considered, as and of itself, as attesting to their orthodoxy. It is considered that the majority of the Muslim world follows either *Ash'ari* or *Maturidi* in creed, and one of the four schools of jurisprudence.[33] They also firmly believe that this superiority in numbers plays in their favour, and they then narrate several sayings of the Prophet to that effect. One such *hadith* is the *Hadith* of the 73 Sects, which exists in different versions, all mentioning that previous religious communities have been divided into numerous sects, but that his will be divided into even more sects. Some versions mention that the Jews were divided into 71 sects, the Christians into 72, and that Prophet Muhammad's community will be divided into 73. All of those sects will deserve Hellfire, except one. When the companions of Prophet Muhammad asked which one, the answer given was '*al-jama'a*' (i.e., the majority).[34] There are several *sahih* versions of the *hadith*, where the saved group is named as '*al-jama'a'*. According to one, reported by Ibn Majah (d.887) and Abu Dawud (d.802), the Prophet said:

> Banu Isra'il has been divided into 71 sects, and my
> community will be divided into 72 sects, all of which are in
> Hellfire, except one: *al-'jama'a*.[35]

What is at stake here is the meaning of *jama'a*. If it is taken to
mean 'the majority', then Sunnis claim that this gives an objective
criterion with which assessing the correctness of a group: its size.
This is the interpretation that the Sunnis favour. For example,
both al-Baghdadi (d.1037) and al-Shahrastani (d.1153), who
wrote heresiographical books about all the different sects claiming
to be Muslims, start with accounts of this *hadith*,[36] with several
versions referenced. Al-Baghdadi states that the majority of the
Muslims belong to the group he describes last, that is, the saved
one. As for al-Shahrastani, he explains that when al-Ash'ari left the
Mu'tazilites, 'he joined the group of the *Salaf*, and he formed the
doctrine which has become the '*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-jama'a*
doctrine', which is precisely the group he said at the beginning
would be saved.[37] The famous Muslim scholar and mystic, al-
Ghazali (d.1111), also acknowledges that there are so many
reports of the Prophet insisting upon following the majority that
they could not be discarded.[38] The *Ash'ari* scholar and
commentator of the Qur'an, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.1209), also
discusses this *hadith* with this answer from the Prophet '*al-jama'a,
al-jama'a, al-jama'a*'. He states that the answer of the Prophet is to
be taken as an indication that the majority is a sign of the
community of the faithful, because if it were not for that, there
would have been no meaning to his describing the saved *firqa*
(group) by being the *jama'a* (which also means 'a group').[39]
The argument is that the Prophet would not have answered
'the group' to the question 'Which group will be saved?', but
rather he was referring to another meaning of *jama'a*, that is, 'the
majority'. This particular notion of numeric superiority as a
criterion to recognise the saved sect is, as we will see below, fiercely
debated by Salafist groups, as they are a clear minority. However, it

is one factor that goes some way in explaining why 'Sunnis-not-claiming-to-be-*Salafis*' seem so confident of them being part of the saved sect: it is because they observe that people around the world from different cultures, histories and backgrounds, do indeed follow one of the two theological schools, and one out of the four Sunni schools of law. As an example, Mufti Ebrahim Desai answers on his website ask-imam.com, when asked a question on the issue of which group is correct:

> Now, if we take a quick survey of the Muslims in the world, we would find that while the Wahabis make up a minority, even in the Arab lands, with probably only Saudia [sic] containing a majority of them, the remainder of the *ummah* are on the *Ashari* and *Maturidi Aqeedah* eg. 200 million Muslims in Indonesia, about 400 million in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, another 150 million in China, Malaysia etc, hundreds of millions in Africa, millions in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine etc; all these are Ash'aris and Maturidis who make up the *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* [sic]. We thus have no need to fear their baseless arguments, and Allah *Ta'ala* Knows Best.[40]

This text shows that Mufti Ebrahim Desai is confident he is right, for the mere reason that the followers of the four schools are more numerous than the Wahhabis, and that the Prophet considered number as a determinant factor. There is another recurring argument that can be summed up as 'If *Ahl al-Sunna* is not the *Ash'aris* then who was?', which al-Maliki used in the article above, where he says:

> If Imams Nawawi, 'Asqalani, Qurtubi, Baqillani, al-Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Haytami, Zakariyyah Ansari, and many others were not among the most brilliant scholars and illustrious geniuses, or of the Sunni Community, then who are the Sunnis?[41]

This argument is one of the most powerful, according to the Sunnis. In effect, it means that the Salafists can only be vague and ambiguous when dealing with figures of the past, such as Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani or al-Nawawi, because dismissing such scholars completely might make their followers doubtful about their honesty. On the other hand, acknowledging them as great scholars could damage their own arguments, as neither of those two, or the others quoted above, had a similar outlook on visiting graves, intercession, the Attributes of God and the like.

To sum up the vision of history of the Sunnis: *Ahl al-sunna wa l-jama‘a* is none other than themselves. They consider that al-Ash‘ari and al-Maturidi have defeated different groups labelled as the Mu‘tazila,[42] the Jahmiyya,[43] the Murji’a,[44] the Jabriyya,[45] the Mujassima,[46] also called Hashwiyya,[47] and the Rafida.[48] *Ash‘arism* and *Maturidism* have then become the dominant theological schools throughout the Muslim world and therefore, being a Sunni means to adhere to one of them as well as to one of the four main schools of Law.

Now that we have described the most widespread vision of Islamic history, we can move on to detail the view of the Salafists.

The Salafists' specific vision of history

This vision of history is gaining momentum and is challenging the one described above on every point. The Salafists characterise themselves by their conviction that the *Ash‘aris* are not the inheritors of al-Ash‘ari, and are not even part of *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jama‘a*, mainly because they allow interpretation of the ambiguous religious texts on the Attributes of God. The Salafists also consider that, for a long period throughout history, only a handful of scholars and people remained on the correct Islamic creed. Finally, they do not grant any significance to the fact that the *Ash‘aris* have been a majority from the ninth/tenth centuries up until today.

Ash'arism *as a misguidance rejected by al-Ash'ari himself*
The Salafists argue that the position held by the *Ash'aris* regarding the Attributes of God was never 'orthodox' and never will be, and does not allow them to be counted as part of *Ahl al-Sunna* for this very reason. Here, we can see that the issue of the Attributes of God has a direct consequence on which scholars to follow, who to grant authority to, and who to consider oneself the inheritor of.

It is commonly agreed by both the Sunnis not claiming to be Salafis and the Salafists, that al-Ash'ari did start off as a Mu'tazili for several decades.[49] However, their opinions diverge on what happened after that. For the Sunnis, al-Ash'ari managed to use his knowledge of the Mu'tazilite theories to actually defeat them and remained on his new doctrine until his death. In stark contrast, the Salafists consider that, before dying, he changed a second time, and then arrived to what they consider the real creed of *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jama'a*. According to the Salafists, after his death, people still following his deviant school made it flourish and spread it all around the world. They said they were guilty of being too soft against innovations (being innovators themselves), and this explains why ignorance, blasphemy and polytheism flourished in the *Umma* (the Islamic community). The Salafists do not possess any declaration from al-Ash'ari or any letter from him explaining his alleged second change of mind. However, it is the official stance of the Salafists that he did change his mind. Their main argument is to rely on copies of a book entitled *al-Ibana*, which they consider his last book, but that others consider as among his first after he left Mu'tazilism.[50] Regardless of whether it was written first or last, current copies of this work contain elements which are inconsistent with al-Ash'ari's known doctrine, such as the saying that God would have two eyes (*aynayn*). However, it appears that the Salafists deem this phrase a strong enough proof to allow them to claim that al-Ash'ari abandoned his teachings. Some of the opponents of the Salafists point out that if al-Ash'ari really had changed his mind a second time, therefore following a

third path, there should have been a trace of at least the same scale as his first change from Mu'tazilism to Sunnism.[51] However, no such trace is available, be it from his immediate disciples, or his books. Salih al-Fawzan, one of the prominent defenders of the official clergy of Saudi Arabia, declares:

> The scholars of Egypt and the shaykhs of al-Azhar defend their creed by the *madhhab* of Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, and Iraq, Tunis, and Morocco by the *madhhab* of al-Ash'ari, and the answer to this is to tell them:
>
> First, the *madhhab* of Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, that he confirmed lately regarding the attributes, was the *madhhab* of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-jama'a* and he changed his mind from what he was upon before in terms of interpretation of the attributes, as becomes clear in his book '*al-Ibanah 'an usul al-diyanah*' and in his book '*al-Maqalat*', and it is known that the *madhhab* of a person is what he confirms at the end [of his life] (...)
>
> Secondly, the *madhhab* is not known by the number of its followers (..._ but by it being right in reference to the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. What the *Ash'aris* are upon, regarding the attributes [of God], is not following the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.[52]

This last sentence, specifying that the *Ash'ari* position on the Attributes of God equals not following the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, is clearly stating that, because of the contradiction with their (i.e., the Salafists') position on the Attributes of God, the author does not consider that the *Ash'aris* abide by the injunctions of the religious texts. These arguments have been dealt with by Nuh Keller, based in Jordan, who wrote:

> (...) the claims that Imam Abul Hasan Ash'ari (d.324/936) repudiated his own positions are not new, but have been

circulated by these Hanbalis for a long time, a fact that compelled the *hadith* master (hafiz) Ibn ʿAsakir to carefully investigate this question, and the *sanad*s (chains of narrators) for the attribution of these repudiations to Ashʿari. The results of his research furnished probably the best intellectual biography of Ashʿari ever done, a book that rebuts these claims thoroughly and unequivocally, called '*Tabyin kadhib al-muftari fi ma nusiba ila al-Imam al-Ashʿari*' ['On showing the untruth of the liars, concerning what has been ascribed to Imam Ashʿari'], that proves that there are liars in all the *sanad*s that impute this to Imam Ashʿari. The book is in print, and whoever would like the details should read it.

Imam Ashʿari's '*al-Ibana ʿan usul al-diyana*' ('The clarification of the bases of the religion') was not his last book, but rather among the *first* after he broke with Muʿtazilism. Imam Kawthari states: 'The "*Ibana*" was authored at the first of his return from Muʿtazilite thought, and was by way of trying to induce Barbahari (d.328/940) to embrace the tenets of faith of *Ahl al-Sunna*. Whoever believes it to be the last of his books believes something that is patently false. Moreover, pen after pen of the anthropomorphists has had free disposal of the text – particularly after the strife (*fitna*) that took place in Baghdad (after A.H. 323, when Hanbalis gained the upper hand in Baghdad, Muslims of the *Shafiʿi madhhab* were beaten, and anthropomorphism became the faith of the day') – so that what is in the work that contradicts the explicit positions transmitted from *Ashʿari* by his own disciples, and their disciples, cannot be relied upon.[53]

With this answer, we can see another trait of this debate: the indication that it has been continuing for centuries. Indeed,

almost none of the arguments from either party, are new. What is occuring nowadays with the definition of *Ahl al-Sunna* is a revivification of polemics that were present at the twelfth century and which culminated with Ibn Taymiyya during the fourteenth century, only to reappear after the mission of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab.

Ibn Hamid ‘Ali[54] investigates the claim that al-Ash‘ari changed his mind before dying in an article dedicated to the case of the book ‘*al-Ibana*’. He sums up his article as follows:

1. ‘*Kitab al-Ibana ‘an usul al-diyana*’ was not the last book of al-Ash‘ari, that is, if we accept it as being one of his books at all.
2. If it was one of his works, it was likely to be his first work or one among his first, before his *madhhab* took its final form.
3. The claim made by Ibn Taymiyya that it was the last of his works has no strong or valid basis.
4. Even if al-Ash‘ari did go through this third phase of his journey towards truth, it would not mean anything, since men are weighed by the truth. The truth does not gain its authority from the one who states it.[55]

Ibn Hamid ‘Ali asserts that Ibn Taymiyya is the first person, in his ‘*Majmu‘ al-Fatawa*’, to have claimed that ‘*Kitab al-Ibana*’ was al-Ash‘ari’s last work.[56] It is true that articles written by Salafists and dedicated to this issue do not mention from what source it is believed that ‘*al-Ibana*’ was al-Ash‘ari’s last book. They then argue that if it is his last book, one should refer to it to be sure of what path he died upon.[57] It is interesting to note that they are in favour of keeping his memory intact and blame his followers for misguidance, as opposed to considering him a misguided cleric. This might be because he was an important historical figure and because of his title as the Imam of *Ahl al-Sunna*. There are also several traditions narrated that seem to be in support of al-Ash‘ari, by predicting blessings upon the

descendants of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari.[58] The prospect that the Prophet would have spoken in favour of him before he appeared might make it more difficult for potential opponents to brand him as a blameworthy innovator.

Now that we have studied the reasons why the Salafists believe that al-Ash'ari renounced the teachings that later became known as *Ash'arism*, we study why they deem that those they consider the self-proclaimed followers of al-Ash'ari went astray.

As we saw earlier, there was consensus regarding the fact that Sunni scholars allowed ambiguous religious texts dealing with God and His Attributes to be interpreted either in a general or a specific sense. The Salafists are not only of the view that the ambiguous religious texts should not be interpreted, but they go as far as to say that interpreting them is a sign of heresy and misguidance. For example, if an *Ash'ari* scholar explains the verse Q 20:5 (*al-Rahman 'ala al-'arshi stawa*) by 'God dominates the Throne', and not by 'God has established Himself over the Throne', the Salafists consider that this scholar has rejected the revelation. Their reasoning is that the literal meaning of '*istawa*' is to be established or seated, and that choosing another meaning implies that one does not accept the Word of God. It also means that if it is proven that a past scholar did interpret those religious texts, then this scholar will be put under the category of scholars who, according to the Salafists, unfortunately fell under the trap and misguidance of 'distorting the religious texts' (as this is what they understand interpreting is, ultimately). We can see here that, because of this single issue, they have drawn a line between those whose creed they consider sound and those who they consider had problems or doubts in their creed. The main problem with that notion is that those Muslim scholars who have interpreted the Attributes of God happen to be, for the most part, either *Ash'aris* or Maturidis. Therefore, we can see that if *not* interpreting the Attributes is essential to the Salafists, then there can be no accommodating of *Ash'arism*, as long as one of the

defining traits of *Ash'arism* is the permissibility to interpret. This rejection of *Ash'arism* cuts right across the different factions of the Salafists, as will be seen in the case studies in Part Three. One proof of that is a pamphlet against the *Ash'aris*, written by al-Hawali, presented earlier.[59] Al-Hawali is a Saudi cleric, who is the object of several lengthy refutations on SalafiPublications.com (a pro-Saudi religious establishment website based in the UK and studied in more detail later) because of some his political activism.[60] However, that same website publishes translated excerpts of his pamphlet in English, without mentioning the name of the author.[61] In one excerpt, to the question 'Are the *Ash'aris* from *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jama'a?*' he mentions:

> Thus, the *Ash'ariyyah* do not enter into it at all. Rather they are outside it.[62]

This is similar to what Salih al-Fawzan, member of the Council of Senior Scholars of Saudi Arabia, explains, after having mentioned that he does not consider the *Ash'aris* non-Muslims:

> This does not mean that we will stay quiet and refrain from clarifying the mistakes of the Ash'aris and the warning against them. *Takfir* is one thing, and exposing mistakes is another thing.[63]

He clearly condemns the *Ash'aris* and, far from considering them as being synonymous with *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jama'a*, he counts them as yet another deviant group among others:

> We say: yes we do pass a judgement of deviation on those who interpret the attributes of Allah *ta'ala* away from what the true meaning proves to be, and tries to give it a meaning which is not a real meaning, be it from the *Ash'aris* or other than them. If this is not deviation, then what is deviation?[64]

He seems to make a clear distinction between *takfir* (considering them as non-Muslims) and *tadlil* (considering them deviated). A few paragraphs later he adds:

> As for the *Ash'aris* not leaving the fold of Islam, this is true. They are part of the bulk of the Muslims. As for belonging to *Ahl al-Sunna*, then no, for they contradict *Ahl al-Sunna wa l-jama'a*. Indeed, *Ahl al-Sunna* confirm the attributes as they came, without any interpretation, and the Ash'aris do not confirm most of them as they came, but rather they interpret them away from the apparent meaning, as this is well-known from them. So how could you consider from the community people who contradict its creed, when the creed is the foundation? Their books are the judge in this affair. Yes, they might be from *Ahl al-Sunna* with regards to certain things, but not in an absolute way.[65]

Here, we can see that he seems to shy away from pronouncing *takfir* (excommunication) of the *Ash'aris*, as he attempts to simply 'correct' the 'mistakes' of the *Ash'aris*. However, some of his other statements may lead the reader to think that he does, in fact, excommunicate the *Ash'aris*, by accusing them of *ta'til*, which means to deny the existence of God or of His Attributes; of *ilhad*, which usually means atheism (but which he seems to use in the meaning of disbelief); and of practising *shirkiyyat*, meaning acts of worship of other than God, as can be seen in the quotes below. For example, he equates interpreting with negating the Attributes of God:

> How could it be said that the one who interprets the attributes of God away from its meaning, and then interprets *yad* by *qudra*, *istawa* by *istila* and *rahma* by *ni'ma*, how could it be said, in spite of all of this, that he believes in those attributes without negating them (*ta'til*)? Isn't that act the very essence of negating? (*'ayn al-ta'til*)[66]

In his collection of fatwas, when he is asked what is meant by *ilhad* in Q 7:180: 'And stay away from those who abuse the names of God' (*dharu al-ladhina yulhiduna fi asma'ihi*), al-Fawzan answers:

> This is similar to what the Ash'aris are saying [when they say]: What is meant by '*yad*' [literally: hand] is '*ni'mah*' [grace], what is meant by '*wajh*' [literally: face] is 'the Essence', and what is similar to this among the invalid interpretations which are, in reality, but disbelief in the names and attributes of Allah, when it is an obligation to confirm them as they came, and to believe in what is indicated by their real meanings.[67]

He considers that there could be no unity with the *Ash'aris* unless their belief is purified:

> It is not possible to present a united front against the enemies of Islam unless the creed is purified from the acts of polytheism (*shirkiyyat*), innovations, superstitions, and disbelief in the names and attributes of God (. . .) If committing sins in acts prevents the Muslims from showing a united front to their enemies, then how about the sins in belief?[68]

He also insists that the creed is a major foundation which does not allow divergence:

> The issue of the attributes [of God] is among those dealing with the creed, on which there can be no divergence.[69]

As for Ibn Baz, he also does not count the *Ash'aris* among *Ahl al-Sunna*:

> Then al-Sabuni,[70] may God guide him, says that God is exempted, Exalted be He, from the body (*jism*), the pupils

(*hadaqah*), auditory meatus (*al-simakh*), tongue (*al-lisan*) and larynx (*al-hanjarah*) is not the way of *Ahl al-Sunna* but rather it is the saying of those who are adepts of the condemned theology speculation (*kalam*).[71]

Ibn Baz also calls interpreting the Attributes a negation of God, where he explains:

> The negation that al-Sabuni makes of these attributes [understand here: the fact that al-Sabuni accepts interpretation of their meaning] is a negation of the Prophet peace be upon him and even more so: it is a negation of Allah *'azza wa jall*, because He mentioned them in His Holy book, and revealed the rest to his Prophet peace be upon him.[72]

After all these statements, it is conspicuous that Salafists, while claiming that they do not take the Ash'aris out of Islam, are accusing them of 'negating God', 'disbelief', and 'rejection of the Qur'an', which are all tantamount to being outside of Islam. Al-Fawzan and his followers might claim that they are not among the so-called *takfiris* (the fringe of the Salafists which is believed to massively consider other Muslims as non-Muslims), because they do not use words with the root *kafara* to describe the *Ash'aris*, but in reality, the phrases used to describe *Ash'ari* teachings leave little room for interpretation.

Even if the Salafists do not consider the *Ash'aris* as non-Muslims, there is still an issue with how to treat the heritage of the *Ash'ari* scholars from the past. The Salafists undermine the authority of most of the major Sunni scholars 'because they interpret'. This is where the tangible consequences of this stance on the Attributes of God can be seen. For example, the Salafists urge people not to talk to people who hold *Ash'ari* views on the Attributes of God, for they describe them as innovators who reject God's revelation. It also means that the followers of the

Salafists gradually refer themselves exclusively to Saudi Arabian preachers for any religious advice. The common grounds between all the different factions of the Salafists is the overwhelming condemnation of *Ash'arism*, precisely because of this issue of the interpretation of the Attributes of God, thus leaving them in an awkward position with regards to the Islamic heritage. This leads us to the second feature of the vision of history purported by the Salafists: it is the notion of a rupture in history, the notion that there were some eras in Islamic history during which, according to them, that most people claiming to be Muslims, or speaking in the name of Islam, did not know what Islam really was at all.

Notions of rupture

In the view of the Salafists, there is a rupture between the *Salaf* and the *Ash'aris* and between al-Ash'ari himself and the *Ash'aris*, after the *Salaf* up to Ibn Taymiyya (about 400 years), and one final 500-year rupture between Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d.1792). Those periods of ruptures were filled, according to them, by deviant sects, the main ones being the *Ash'aris* and the Maturidis.

In an article published on spubs.com, there is a short overview which details how the Salafists perceive Islamic history. The authors of this article are convinced that 'there is nothing more appropriate in setting out the scene, or if you like, laying out the complete scenario, so as to give the true context of things to come, than the following speech of shaykh Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali'[73] (which, according to the footnote, was originally recorded on tape, subsequently transcribed in Arabic by Abu 'Abdullah Khalid adh-Dhafayri on Sahab.net, then translated into English by Spubs.com). Rabi' al-Madkhali (b.1931) is a retired university professor at the Islamic University of Medina, and a famous preacher in Saudi Arabia. He explains (translation provided by Spubs):

And the *Salaf us-saalih* – may Allaah be pleased with them – understood completely these *Rabbaani* [i.e., Allaah's statements in the Book] and *Nubuwwi* [i.e., of the *Sunnah*) notifications and warnings. So they perceived the danger of innovations and their people upon Islaam, and the *Ummah* of Islaam. Thus, they faced them (the innovations) and their people with positions entailing warning and (strong) determination. They used to place barriers and preventative blockades of caution and of warning between the *Ummah* and between the wolves that lie in wait, lurking in ambush, and also announcing hatred of them, and ordering boycotting of them, and cutting off from them. Thus, the majority of the *Ummah* was upon the truth, and the *Sunnah*, and they used to be in goodness, and security, with respect to their *aqeedah*, their *deen* and their methodologies.

Then, when laxity and softness (*tasaahul*) occurred with *Ahl ul-Bida'* and there were to be found the *Mumayyi'oon*, the People of Innovation and evil, descended upon the Islamic *Ummah* like the descending of violent torrents (of ocean) upon the banks. And nothing at all stood in the face of them, until they enshrouded the Islamic world, both societies and rulers, except for a small (number of them).

Until Allaah brought Shaykh ul-Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah (*rahimahullaah*), so he assaulted *Ahl ul-Bida'*, and made excursions upon them by way of evidence and proofs from the Book and the *Sunnah*, and the *Manhaj* of the *Salaf*, by which he awakened the *Ummah* from its lethargy, slumber. And Allaah saved whomever He willed by way of him.

Then laxity and softness (*tasaahul*) occurred, and then those hurling (violent) torrents returned, with evil, innovations, misguidance and *shirk*. Then Allaah brought the Imaam, the *Mujaddid*, Muhammad bin 'Abdul-Wahhaab to repel them from the *Ummah*, and so he assaulted the people of innovations and misguidance and attached them with

evidence and proofs and with the sword and the spear, until he returned the strength to Islaam, the illumination back to *Tawheed*, and the splendour and purity back to the *Sunnah*.[74]

This lengthy quote illustrates effectively the vision of history of the Salafists. They have a cyclic vision of history which is incompatible with the continuity claimed by the Sunnis not claiming to be Salafis, mentioned earlier. According to the Salafists, there were long periods during which the people of 'innovations' were dominant. These periods are 400 years between the end of the *Salaf* up to Ibn Taymiyya's times (fourteenth century), and then another of approximatively 500 years, leading up to the emergence of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's mission. Since then, knowledge has supposedly flourished.

Long chronological lists of recognised Sunni scholars[75] are hard to find in the literature of the Salafists, due to their vision of history. In fact, the Salafists tend to rely extensively on the writings of Ibn Taymiyya when they need to give references. For example, when Ibn Baz introduces his book '*Tanbihat fi al-radd 'ala man ta'awwala 'l-sifat*', he says that there are many quotes from the *Salaf* that he could use to prove the position of the *Salaf* on the Attributes of God. However, instead, he gives quotes gathered by Ibn Taymiyya:

> I will now quote several important narrations from the *Salaf Salih* in this regard, to clarify for the reader the correctness of what I have mentioned so far: the Chaykh of Islam Ibn Taymiyya may Allah have mercy upon him said that . . .[76]

Thereafter come the quotes from scholars of the *Salaf*, given and explained by Ibn Taymiyya. The same goes with Ibn al-Qayyim, the student of Ibn Taymiyya, who is Ibn Baz's only other reference in '*Tanbihat*'. The consequence of ignoring most of the Muslim scholars in history as a reference, is therefore that number is not

considered a reference when it comes to assess who is part of *Ahl al-Sunna* and who is not.

Numeric superiority is not decisive

As we saw earlier, the Sunnis are of the view that the path that most Muslims are on must be the correct one. The Salafists completely disregard this understanding. They adhere to one version of the *Hadith* of the '73 Sects', according to which the saved sect is made up of those who followed what the Prophet and his companions were upon. Taken as such, and without reference to other versions, this phrase can mean a group of any size. As for the version which says *al-jama'a*, that is, 'the group', and which has been interpreted to mean the majority, the Salafists are of the view that here, what is meant is 'being unanimous on the truth', not 'the majority'.[77] For example, in his '*Tanbihat*', Ibn Baz interprets this *hadith* to mean: 'It is compulsory upon the Muslims to be unanimous on the truth'. The Salafists acknowledge that they are not the most numerous group, but as they do not grant to this criterion any weight in terms of assessing righteousness, this is not an issue for them. To illustrate, we can quote al-Fawzan who wrote:

> (. . .) the *madhhab* is not known by the number of its followers (. . .) but by it being right in reference to the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. What the *Ash'aris* are upon, regarding the Attributes [of God], is not following the Qur'an and the Sunnah.[78]

The importance of the number of followers is continually downplayed and there is an acknowledgement that only a fraction of people can be considered as scholars on the right path. This is clearly illustrated by an answer given by Muhammad Bazmul,[79] a contemporary Saudi cleric who is ideologically close to Rabi' al-Madkhali, that is, in support of the Saudi government, who, when asked to give names of scholars with whom to learn a 'correct methodology', answered (translation mine, from French):

The following question was asked to Shaykh Bazmul during a phone conversation in Masjid Al-Salaf al-Salif Sunday October 13th:

Question [the person who asks the question says]: I want to travel to Muslim countries to study and learn my religion according to the correct methodology with scholars. So my question is, where do you advise me to go? May Allah bless you.

Answer: the *Salafi* scholars are here in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like Shaykh Abdul-'Aziz Al al-Shaykh, Shaikh Salih Al-Fawzan, Shaikh Rabi' Al-Madkhali and Shaikh Ahmad Najmi. Also in Yemen, there are *Salafi* scholars, students of Shaykh Muqbil al-Wadi'i. But not the group of Abu al-Hasan al-Ma'ribi. This group is deviated. However, there are groups of students of Shaykh Muqbil al-Wadi'i, a man who is a *khalifa* (the successor) of Shaykh Muqbil in Yemen. Maybe you could go to them and study with them. Also there a few *Salafi* scholars in Kuwait, like a man called Tariq as-Subay'i. This man is a *Salafi* scholar ('*Alim*). However, if you go to a specific country, ask about that place, ask, for example, somebody from here, especially Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali, for example, about this place, and ask about the scholars of this place. Because, to be honest, we do not know many a *Salafi* scholar except here in Saudi Arabia.[80]

This answer acknowledges that there are not many scholars whom the Salafists deem reliable. Bazmul found it difficult to quote centres outside Saudi Arabia where a person could learn their religion properly. The questioner did not ask where he could get *Salafi* or Wahhabi teachings, he asked about where to obtain correct learning, and he is being answered with only three 'safe' localities. It is common for Salafists to consider that, during the last two centuries since the death of Muhammad ibn

'Abd al-Wahhab, real scholars of Islam have only emanated from the Saudi state. For example, the website Salafi Publications mentions:

> And the great blessings in this country can be seen by the fact [that], by and large, the Major Scholars of *Ahl us-Sunnah* have not been found except in Saudi Arabia, of course with some exceptions.[81]

Although they do refer to themselves as being *Ahl al-Sunna*, what the Salafists are, in fact, referring to is but a small portion of the Muslim world, and its scholars are mainly from only one country: Saudi Arabia.

Referring to 'Sunnism': a word of caution

To sum up this exposition of the vision of Islamic history of the Salafists, it now appears clear that the meaning of the concepts of 'Sunnism' and 'Ahl al-Sunna' is highly disputed, and it can refer to diametrically opposed groups. In some instances, it is used to refer to the *Ash'aris* and Maturidis who have remained loyal to one of the four major Sunni schools of Law continuously throughout history, from the end of the period of the *Salaf* to date. In other cases, it refers to today's Salafists and their ancestors (fourteenth century) affiliated to the *Hanbali* school of Law, a smaller group in size. Both the Salafists and the Sunnis use the term *Ahl al-Sunna* to refer to themselves and to exclude the other group, classified as deviant. They are, in actual fact, diametrically opposed. An example of this classification can be found in an article on bakkah.net, a website providing advice, in English, to Muslims who might want to study in Saudi Arabia. This article was on the front page of the website from its publication in 2003 until at least 2009, and is now in the archives. It is entitled The Reality of Al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam. The author, who is

also the administrator of the website, realised that Al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam (d.1262) was, in the webmaster's terms, 'an enemy of the scholars the Sunnah'. He explains:

> A little over two years ago, I came across a booklet in Arabic called '*Bidaayatus-Suwal fee 'Tafdheel Ar-Rasool*' ('The Superiority of the Prophet' *sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*, as formerly found on Bakkah.net) by Al-'Izz ibn 'Abdis-Salaam. Since it had been printed along with comments from Shaykh Muhammad Naasir Ad-Deen Al-Albaanee, I felt it was worthy of being translated, especially due to his statement (...)
>
> At that time, I was not aware of the reality of this man, Al-'Izz ibn 'Abdis-Salaam. After hearing our scholars begin to warn against him, clarifying that he was not from *Ahlus-Sunnah* at all, in fact he was a bitter enemy of the scholars of the *Sunnah*, and then reading what the brother, Khaalid Ath-Thufayree, had gathered about him, I felt it incumbent on me to write something in English to clarify his affair, especially since it was I who introduced him to many of the English-speaking Muslims by way of the aforementioned translation and its placement on www.bakkah.net (...)
>
> Al-'Izz Ibn 'Abdis-Salaam was an *Ash'aree*
>
> Ash'arees are a people who twist the texts of the Book and the *Sunnah* until they explain away all of Allaah's Attributes, except seven. This was the belief of Al-'Izz ibn 'Abdis-Salaam (...)
>
> Furthermore, regarding those who affirm all of Allaah's Attributes, like His Hand and His Face, he said:
>
> 'The *Hashawiyyah* (those who place padding inside of dolls) and the *Mushabbahah*, those that claim that Allaah is like His Creation, are of two types: The first type are those who have no problem openly proclaiming their *hashw* (meaning their claim that Allaah is like His Creation); the

second type are those who hide under the *math-hab* of the *Salaf* . . .'

The Ash'arees have always claimed that *Ahlus-Sunnah* are *Mushab-bihah* and *Mujassimah* (those who liken Allaah to His Creation), so this is not shocking. However, his labeling them with *Hashawiyyah*, that they are stuffing or putting the padding in dolls by way of their affirmation of the Attributes, is a disgusting insult, showing his sheer animosity for *Ahlus-Sunnah*.[82]

The last paragraph clearly demonstrates that, for the Salafists, *Ahl al-Sunna* throughout history is the very group accused of anthropomorphism by the *Ash'aris*. This is why the author here calls the *Ash'aris* the 'enemies of the scholars of the *Sunnah'*. It is vital to be aware of this difference before envisaging any contemporary study dealing with Sunnism in general, and with Wahhabism or Salafism in particular, as when Salafists call themselves Sunnis, what they mean by Sunnism is the opposite of what the Ash'aris and the Maturidis have always intended by the term. The Salafists are gradually succeeding at rewriting the intellectual history of Sunnism to suit their own theories, as Ibn Baz does in his rebuttal of interpretation. He asserts:

Al-Sabuni quoted in his second article that *Ahl al-Sunna* are known by two ways: one would be the way of the *Salaf*, and the other one would be the way of the *khalaf* (. . .) until the end of the quote. This is clearly wrong, and nobody ever said that before him, as far as I can tell.[83]

Here, Ibn Baz considers that al-Sabuni was the first to ever mention that there were two ways of interpretation that were acceptable. However, as seen in Chapter 2, it was very common and widespread for Sunni scholars to describe the approach to ambiguous texts in two different ways. Both ways were considered

correct, as long as the literal meaning of the phrase was discarded. How, then, can Ibn Baz make such a comment, according to which nobody except al-Sabuni ever said the positions of *Ahl al-Sunna* were divided into these two methodologies? There are only two possible explanations: either Ibn Baz is attempting to deceive his audience into thinking that al-Sabuni's position is a marginal one, or he genuinely believes that nobody ever made those claims before al-Sabuni, which would show a gap in his theological knowledge as a Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, especially considering that even Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged that this claim was 'all over the books' of the scholars.[84] In either case, Ibn Baz's statement, which is both bold and inaccurate, proves that there is a deliberate attempt to change the perception of how Muslim scholars dealt with the ambiguous verses and *hadith*.

This notion of diamterically opposed meanings of *Ahl al-Sunna* has already been noted by some commentators. Ibn Hamid 'Ali makes this remark:

> When Shaykh 'Uthaymin makes reference to the *madhhab* of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Hadith*, it is actually a reference to the *madhhab* some of the Hanbalis of the past, some of whom had anthropomorphist leanings, and had always been intolerant of those who reject their particular approach, while always claiming to represent the *Ahl al-Sunna*. Modern-day cries of such people to return to the methodology (*Minhaj*) of the *Salaf* is no more than the revival of the old intolerant tendencies of such Hanbalis to put down anyone who has a different view from themselves.[85]

From this, it becomes patently clear to see that the aforementioned two visions of history are opposed in every possible way. Islamic Sunni history is being rewritten today by the Salafists. The issue of the Attributes of God has offered us a prism with which to assess the method employed by the Salafists to rewrite today's history.

CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDIES ON THE DEBATE AROUND THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The issue of the Attributes of God and the worldview of the Salafists has had consequences in Muslims's lives that can be seen in the following case studies. These cases from 'Cyber Islamic Environments' exemplify that the impact of refusing to interpret ambiguous verses and *hadith* is twofold: this stance has revived an age-old theological debate and the consequences of this debate have included people leaving Islam, and misunderstandings and confusion over the definition of God in Islam.

Presentation of the 'Cyber Islamic Environments' used for these case studies

'Cyber Islamic Environments' is the phrase used by Gary Bunt to describe 'a variety of contexts, perspectives and applications of the media by those who define themselves as Muslims. These may contain elements of specific Muslim worldviews and notions of exclusivity, combined with regional and cultural understanding of the media and its validity.'[1] Although it was coined nearly a decade ago, his phrase is reused here as it is the most appropriate

for our needs, as we have looked at materials published by people who define themselves as Muslims.

For these case studies, a variety of websites have been used. Each one of them is representative of a certain trend or contains examples of the consequences of this debate in cyber Islamic Environments. Some websites have been used because they are emblematic of the Salafist scene in the UK: notably Salafipublications.com or videos from a 'rival' (but ideologically close) mosque Green Lane Masjid.

Debates on the reality of God in Sunni Islam and on anthropomorphism

Salafists recuse the accusation of anthropomorphism

Salafists consider the accusation of anthropomorphism as unfair. They consider that they are affirming the Attributes of God that He affirmed Himself and that therefore they should not be accused of anthropomorphism. They also define anthropomorphism as saying that Allah's Attributes are like that of a human, although, their description of God, based on their stance on the attributes, leads them to say things like 'Allaah has two feet'. For example, here are the statements of Abu Usama ath-Thahabi, one of the imams of Green Lane Masjid, a prominent Salafist mosque in Birmingham. He says in a YouTube video entitled 'The Correct understanding of the Attributes of God':

> The meaning here, of what the imam is saying, is that the *Sunnah*, is that the *'aqidah*, is not for *qiyas*, that's the meaning here. The *'aqidah* of al-Islam is not for *qiyas*. There's no *majaal*, there's no place in *'aqidah* (...) when it comes (...) there's no place for *qiyas* in *'aqidah*, except in very very tight circumstances. Tight circumstances. And we'll come to that later and *in shaa Allaah* concerning some of Allaah's Attributes.

If the human being, having two of something is a sign of completeness, then if it's complete for the human being, when it comes to Allaah *subhaanahu wa ta'aala*, if it's a characteristic of completeness in a human being, in a human being [sic], then Allaah deserves it, right, more than anyone, to have that attribute, attributed to him in that full manner. Like the foot of Allaah. The narration brings Allaah will put His foot over the Hellfire. If a human being has only one foot, something happened to his other foot, then this is a sign of deficiency in that human being. Doesn't mean he's bad, but he's not complete, people want to look at him as being someone who lost a vital part of his body. So the narrations about the foot of Allaah comes [sic] in the singular form. So do we establish that Allaah only has one foot? *'Ulama* say no. Allaah has two feet. Although the text mention [sic] one because with the human being, one foot is deficient, so with Allaah *'azza wa jall* it's deficient. That is a type of *qiyas*, and in this *qiyas*, very strict, small, opportunity to make *qiyas*.[2]

Abu Usama ath-Thahabi draws a parallel between what is perfect for the human being and what should then, according to him, be perfect for God. He does not provide the rationale for such a comparison. This would be viewed by the Ash'aris as anthropomorphism. It also undermines the claim of the Salafists that they uphold that God does not resemble His creations, in that they seem to be taking what is perfect for a human being as a reference point for what should be perfect for God.

Another rival Salafist organisation, salafpublications.com (also referred to as 'Spubs'), has, on the other hand, put a lot of effort into rejecting this claim of anthropomorphism. They have issued a nine-part series entitled 'Destroying the slander of Anthropomorphism', where they explain that anthropomorphism only consists of saying that Allah's hand is like that of a human being.

They do not acknowledge that traditional scholars were of the view that taking texts 'literally' was a type of anthropomorphism as well. This does not prevent them from saying that Allah sees 'by' eyes that are 'real' in their commentary of the *Hamawiyyah*, the famous epistle on the creed written by Ibn Taymiyyah [the emphasis in the text is not mine]:

> 16.1 ALLAAH HAS TWO EYES THAT BEFIT HIM.-
> *Ahl-us- Sunnah* has agreed upon this – He Sees by them –
> them being real, not resembling the eyes of the creation.-
> They are Attributes that pertain to His Self.
>   16.1.1 QUR'AAN (54):14 16.1.2 *HADEETH*:Muslim
> Vol. 4, H7006: "AND your Lord is not one-eyed"; (. . .)
>   16.2 IT DOES NOT MEAN "KNOWLEDGE" OR
> "THE ABILITY TO SEE" i.e. *al 'Ilm* or *ar-Ru'yah*, for
> several reasons (. . .)
>   16.2.2 THE EYES ARE DESCRIBED SUCH THAT
> THEY CAN ONLY BE EYES. – Refer to *hadeeth* quoted
> in 16.1.2[3]

Here, the authors have added the claim that '*Ahl al-Sunna* has agreed on that'.

Dr Abdullah al-Farsi is another English-speaking, Saudi-trained Salafist preacher, now an instructor at the Islamic Online University, founded by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips. Al-Farsi's lectures used to be hosted by ahya.org. The lesson dealing with the names and Attributes of God is titled 'Sifat Eyes Ears'. Al-Farsi is asked whether God has ears or not. He answers that because there are no explicit texts affirming it or negating this, it cannot be confirmed or denied:

> It is not accurate to say that no one known amongst the
> '*Ahl al-Sunna* said that Allah has ears. This is not an
> accurate statement. It is accurate to say that it is not

common amongst the scholars of *Ahl al-sunna* to say this, but to deny it altogether, this is not true. I do not recall right now but I recall that I have come across some quotations at least. Now they base it on a *hadith* where the Prophet says '*maa adhina Rabbuka li-ahadin ka idhnihi li qaari'in hasan al-sawt*' that Allah did not give His ears in hearing to something or to someone more than some person who reads Qur'an or recites Qur'an in a beautiful voice.[4]

He then adds that the *hadith* does not mean that God has one ear or two ears because, according to him, here the verb '*adhina*' is equal to '*sami'a*', which simply means 'to hear' and attributes are not derived from verbs. To conclude he says:

> It is true that we cannot say that Allah has two ears, and also it is true to say that we cannot deny it, we cannot deny it, because we don't know, how could we deny it?.[5]

This is similar to the position that *Ash'ari* scholars have classified as anthropomorphism. Where an *Ash'ari* would have said that God has no ears, the Salafists say that they do not take sides because the issue was not specifically dealt with by the Prophet.[6] In the same recording, he is asked a second question about the permissibility of saying that God has two eyes, when the word '*ayn* in the Qur'an is not found in the dual form attributed to God. The answer of Dr Abdullah al-Farsi is also one of the main fundamental points of the creed of the Salafists, mentioned by Ibn 'Uthaymin in his treatise on the creed:[7]

> The strongest proof that most of the scholars of *Ahl al-Sunna* use regarding the two eyes for Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* is the *hadith*, which is in Bukhari and Muslim and other books of *hadith*, which is the *Hadith* of the *Dajjal*[8] where the Prophet

says that one of the attributes of *Dajjal* is that he is cock-eyed, one eye is spoiled, and then the Prophet *salla Allah 'alayhi wa sallam* says 'while your Lord is not cock-eyed' that means He has both two eyes [sic] to be perfect, both two eyes are perfect. Also there is another *hadith* which Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya has mentioned and also Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen *rahimahullah* has mentioned, and some scholars consider it to be an OK *hadith*, *hasan*, it says that Allah has two eyes.[9]

This argument consists of saying that because the Prophet said that God is not one-eyed, this would prove that God has two eyes. This reasoning has been criticised by the Ash'aris because there is no proof that it would be two and not three, four or other than that, and also because it could simply mean that God is not one-eyed because He does not have any imperfection, not because He would necessarily have two eyes. The lecture of al-Farsi quoted above featured on that website from 28 May 2004 until 2010.

This Salafist stance has attracted the criticism of people online defending *Ash'ari* principles. For example, the user 'Abu Humayd' from the forum board associated with a Shaykh Mohammad Yasir from Bradford, who has issued several anti-wahhabi videos, says:

> 8. What i find REALLY DISTURBING and on the borders of jismiyyah is proven as i watch this video [referring to a video of Abdul Rahman Hassan]. At 19.40 this Shaykh says: 'Allah's sound, the voice . . .' Whilst saying this he does isharah to his own mouth. All i can say is: لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله. I am no way going to listen to more of this nonsense.[10]

This remark indicates that he suspects the speaker of falling into anthropomorphism for having pointed towards his own mouth while also attributing a sound to Allah.

The Sunni Answers blog

Another example of the debate on anthropomorphism can be taken from the writings of Abu Adam al-Naruiji. A convert from Norway, now based in Kuwait, and who teaches *Ash'ari* creed and *Hanafi* fiqh, he has opened a blog entitled 'Sunni Answers, challenging heresies head-on' where he discusses anthropomorphism and atheism. In a post entitled 'The difference between the Wahabi creed and Islam,' he wrote:

> I am often asked to make a list of things that are different between the wahabi creed (i.e. that of their leaders) and Islam.
>
> The core difference is that when wahabis say that Allaah does not resemble His creation, they mean that He is different in the same way as created things differ from one another, like in the case of fingerprints. Everybody has different fingerprints. So when they say Allaah has a hand, but 'not like ours,' they mean that it has different physical characteristics, such as color, number of fingers, or print, or something like that. This is true, because they believe Allaah is something that can be pointed at in a direction and has a limit, i.e. a shape and size. For simplicity, let us call it a body, because a body is anything with a size and shape, even if many wahabis do not like this word.
>
> All creations as observed by our eyes, have a shape, and differ only in the form of the shape, and in size. Since the wahabis believe that their god is a body, their belief is that he is only different in bodily characteristics, such as the exact form and size. This means that he would be part identical to creation, and part different; the way created things differ.
>
> On the other hand, Sunnis say that the reality of Allaah's existence absolutely does not resemble that of His creation. They do not believe that Allaah is different from His creation merely in the way created things differ from one

another. For this reason, Sunnis say that the reality of Allaah's existence is not bodily. That is, He must be without size or shape (. . .)

In conclusion, the wahabi belief is that Allaah differs from creation the way creation differ from one another. They believe that His existence is bodily, like that of creatures. This is the most fundamental difference between Sunnis and wahabis.[11]

In the comments, someone raises the arguments made by a Salafist blogger 'Um Abdullah':

She has a very telling argument against Ibn al Jawzi's in which she says:

'Because they (Ibn Jawzi, the *Ashariyyah*, and the *Mutakalimeen*) could not comprehend a hand that is not like what we see and know, because of Their inability to conceive of a reality beyond material experience led them into bewilderment and to liken the Attributes of the Transcendent God to the attributes of originated things [that is, to commit *tashbīh*] in their minds.

(. . .) The belief in Allah having a *yad* (hand) that is different than that of creation, a hand that we could not imagine because of not seeing something similar to it, for Allah is not like anything, is not impossible.

Yes, it puzzles the mind, it is uncomprehendable because it is something that we have not seen anything like, but it is not impossible, only puzzling and bewildering. If someone had told the people of the past, who came thousands of years before us, about the computer and internet that we have today, they would not believe [sic] it because they wouldn't be able to comprehend it since they have not seen anything even close to it, but does that mean it is impossible just because they couldn't comprehend it, or seen anything like it? No.'[12]

Abu Adam al-Naruiji replies:

> Yes, this computer analogy is from the principle that I mentioned (. . .)
>
> You have to know their principles to understand what their [sic] aiming at in all their beatings around the bush. This is the tradition of their imam Ibn Taymiyyah, he was described by one scholar, saying, 'you are like a sparrow, flying here and there.'[13]

In a post entitled 'Anthropomorphism, the first step towards atheism', he adds:

> Many people today have the belief that Allaah is a being in a particular location, i.e. something with size. This belief is in itself incompatible with the teachings of Islam, and makes one a non-Muslim.
>
> However, this is not the only problem. Another problem is that this is sometimes presented to the world as the real view of Islam, and as such makes Muslims look like clownish buffoons. Harsh words, yes, but unfortunately it is an understatement. This creed is incompatible with a logical and scientific view, like any of the other arbitrary religions out there.[14]

He also highlights the challenges posed by translation, when dealing with explaining anthropomorphism. Someone sent him the *fatwa* of an Indian scholar on the Attributes of God and he comments on the content and wording:

> **[Statement of the Indian scholar]**: The belief of the *Ahle-Sunnat* is this that Allaah *Ta'ala* does have a Hand but it is unlike the hand of the creation. And Allaah *Ta'ala* has a Face, which is unlike the face of man or any other creation.

These are unique to Allaah *Ta'ala* alone and their condition and comprehension are beyond the understanding of man. Only Allaah *Ta'ala* alone knows what these actually are.

Abu Adam's comment: This is not very precise. First of all, he translates '*yad*' as 'hand', and this is very misleading. Who said that the meaning of '*yad*', when ascribed to Allaah is has [sic] the meaning of 'hand' in English? What he should have said was 'Allaah has a *yad* unlike the *yad* of the creation.' That would have been more careful. When he translates 'yad' as 'hand' then he has restricted the possible Arabic meanings of '*yad*' to the possible meanings of 'hand' in English. In other words, he has already engaged in *ta'weel*, even though he seems to be attempting *tafweed*. Not only that, he has also translated an Arabic word that is ambiguous in meaning when ascribed to Allaah into another language. This is not allowed if the translation result is potentially misleading, as it clearly is in this case. The scholars agreed that words used to ascribe attributes to Allaah must be verbatim from scripture texts; either the Qur'aan or highly authentic *hadiiths*. If they are not, such as when translating, then the words used must connotate glorification and not be misleading at all. These conditions are not met here (...)

As for *wajh*, which he has a [sic] again translated into a misleading word, namely face, is not said to be an attribute by all sunnis. Many said that *wajh* means the deeds that are done for Allaah's sake. Other's said that it refers to Allaah Himself, and not an attribute of His. The translation of *wajh* as face is even worse than the translation of *yad* as 'hand'. 'Face' has no meaning in English I can think of that befits Allaah, whereas 'hand' sometimes means 'power' or 'control' such as in 'the decision is not in my hands.'

Add to all this that non-literal meanings of words are interpreted according to context. I.e. the linguistic tool for knowing whether a literal or figurative meaning is meant is to

look at the context. So if I say 'the guy is a lion,' you know I am speaking figuratively, because a 'guy' is a human being, and thus the meaning of 'lion' here is something like 'fierce' or 'brave.' On the other hand, if I said 'lions are a type of cat,' you know I am speaking literally. So when one translates '*yad*' as 'hand' then one has strongly implied that the literal meaning of '*yad*' is meant, by the contextual clue of this translation, and this adds to the danger of being misleading.[15]

Here Abu Adam criticises the Indian scholar who translated *yad* by hand and *wajh* by face as it specifies a meaning when he seems to advocate to not specify a meaning. This is why Abu Adam recommends to say 'Allah has a *yad* not like our *yad*' in order to avoid making what he considers to be misleading statements.

The era of YouTube preachers: the example of Abdul Rahman Hassan

Among the many self-appointed internet imams of today is Abdul Rahman Hassan. He is a young Salafist internet preacher, who appeared online in November 2012. He refuses to state clearly on the internet where he is from or where he has learned, which is interesting, considering that in several of his lectures he asks people to pay attention to where they take their religious knowledge from. A disclaimer on one of his videos states, 'Ustadh AbdulRahman Hassan is not associated with any *masjid*, nor is he a representative of any *masjid* and the views which he holds may differ to the management of the *masjid* in which the talks take place.'[16] A few clues are gleaned as he quotes al-Fawzan as a reference (but so do those who oppose him), and he uploaded a phone conversation he had with Abdul Rahman al Khudayr from Saudi Arabia, whom he considers as a teacher. He is from either the quietist fringe of the Salafists or the politicos (he does not talk enough about politics online for one to ascertain if he is a politico. His debate with an

extremist seems to put him with the quietists, but if one is to believe his enemies, some of the teachers that he has learned with are 'the Quṭbīs Abū Ishāq alḤuwaynī and, according to a narration, Muḥammad Ḥassan, and likewise Salāh al-Maghāmisī who is a Ṣūfī, all of whom have been disparaged by the *Salafī* scholars', and would classify as politicos). His first video is on a channel called 'Pearls of knowledge'. Since then, he has apparead on various other channels: his own personal channel named after himself, that of his friend Abu Taymiyyah and the Naseeha Sessions channel held by another youth sensation, who is also his student, Imran Yusuf, also known as 'Dawah man' (nicknamed Drama-man by Mohammad Yasir from Bradford for his tendency to use his hands excessively when he speaks and to make bold statements when he delivers his lectures). During his four years of internet activity, Hasan has made a name for himself by debating with other Salafists, such as Spubs, the Deobandis represented by a Shaykh Mohammad Yasir from Bradford, the Brelwis represented by Asrar Rashid and the extremists represented by Muhammed Mizanur Rahman. In December 2014, he was heavily criticised online for having accepted to hold and record a debate with the staunch defender of the so-called Islamic State, Muhammed Mizanur Rahman, also known as Abu Bara. Recently (August 2016), Abu Bara' was found guilty of supporting terrorism, along with Anjem Choudhury of al-Muhajirun, and put in prison. The striking feature of this debate is the amiable atmosphere in which it took place. Hasan refers to the extremist as *Shaykhuna* (our shaykh) and *Akhuna* (our brother) frequently. He also adopts a humble attitude, stating that if he happens to be in the wrong, he will then surrender. He is much more accommodating than with his other well-known debate with a Brelwi. At one point, Abu Bara' quotes, to defend himself, a statement on the caliphate by an *Ashʿari* and *Shafiʿi* scholar from the eleventh century named al-Mawardi. Abdul Rahman Hassan dismisses this quote by saying:

Akhuna Abu Bara: al-Imam Al-Mawardi he is from *Ahlu l-Kalam* first of all. He is an A*sh'ariyyun* 'quh' [meaning he is an *Ash'ari* 'to the bone']! Mawardi is from *Ahlu l-Batil*, *Ahlu l-Bid'ah*! He is from the *Ash'airah*! He's from the *mutakallimin*! And for us to leave Ibn Taymiyyah alone, and say we're not going to take from Ibn Taymiyyah and we're going to take from al-Mawardi, *wallahi fi-hi nadhar* [i.e., this is arguable].[17]

This remark of his is only possible because he knows that he shares the same ideological roots that the extremist is referring to. The debate has been uploaded by a friend of Abu Bara', Abu Waleed, who is behind Salafi Media UK. They have put it online because they consider that it plays in their favour and, to a certain extent, it does. This shows the challenges posed by trying to debate within a fringe group that has the same reference points. This is similar to a document available on Brixton Masjid website, written against the same 'Salafi Media UK' organisation, highlighting 'the 25 differences between Salafis and Omar Bakri's cult groups (from al-Muhajirun to Salafimedia.com)' where the authors say in the section 'The Ulama (b)':

The only scholars to be referred to [by the extremists] include Omar Bakri Muhammad Fustuq, who is the primary source to be followed as he is a *Mufti* and *Mujtahid*, in keeping with what was inherited from *Hizb ut-Tahreer UK* in the md-1990s. Other options for knowledge are 'Abdullah Faisal al-Jamayki, Abu Hamza al-Misri, Anwar al-Awlaki, Abu Qatadah, and Abu Baseer at-Tartusi.[18]

The document then provides a longer list of people that Brixton Mosque views as scholars, in the opposing column:

The contemporary *Salafi* scholars of the *Sunnah* of the recent period are: Imam Muhammad Nasiruddeen al-Albani; Imam

'Abdul'Azeez bin Baz, Imam Muhamad bin Salih al-'Uthaymeen, Imam Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi'I, al-'Allamah Salih al-Fawzan, al-Ma'ali Salih Ali Shaykh, Shaykh al-Qadi Salih al-Luhaydan, Shaykh 'Abdul-Muhsin al-'Abbad al-Badr, Shaykh Rabi ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, Shaykh Wasiullah al-'Abbas Shaykh al-Imam 'Abdullah bin 'Abdul-'Azeez al-'Aqeel, Shaykh Ihsan Ilahi Thaheer, Shaykh Badi'uddeen Shah as-Sindi and many more which would be too many to list here.[19]

The authors believe that the extremists only rely on a handful of scholars, whereas their list would be too long to quote. What they do not acknowledge, though, is that their own list is made of people who themselves castigate hundreds of years of scholarship as being either deviated or 'not upon a sound belief'. What they fault the terrorists with is what the Sunnis fault them with – only accepting scholars who consider Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab as a scholar, thereby putting aside the *Ash'ari* scholars as misguided in their creed.

The other significant feature of the teachings of Hasan adds a refinement to the vision of history that is usually held by the Salafists. In a debate with someone meant to represent the *Ash'ari* school of throught, and for which he had posed as a condition that only scholars from the *Salaf* period would be quoted, he seems to be shifting the vision of history into a slightly different direction. The new adaptation of the vision of history is that instead of acknowledging that the *Ash'aris* were a majority in history, which is a position that even figures such as Ibn Baz had, he is now adopting the trend of saying that Ash'aris were never the majority, that there were only about 21 famous *Ash'aris* and that key figures such as Ibn Hajar al Asqalani and al-Nawawi were never Ash'aris. He says:

You said *Ash'aira* and *Maturidiyya* [are] *Ahl al-Sunna*. The Prophet *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa* sallam he said 'My ummah is

divided into how many 3? Are gonna divide into how many 3? [asking the audience]. 73! All of them in Hellfire except what? *Al-Ash'airah* and *al-Maturidiyya* are 2! How do you say both of them are *Ahl al-Sunna*? The Prophet said all of them except what? One! And you're saying *Ash'airah Maturidiyyah* both of them are upon the *Haqq* [the truth]. And they differ on matters of *Usul*! *Usul*! *Usul*! And they're both *Ahl al-Sunna*? *Kayf*? [How?] (. . .) We believe *Asha'ira* and *Maturidiyya* are not from *Ahl al-Sunna*. *Ahl al-Sunna* are those who go to the *kitab* and *Sunna bi fahmi s-salafi s-salih* [with the understanding of the Pious Precedecessors]. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, al-Bayhaqi, al-Nawawi: we are differing with you if they even were *Ash'aira*. So don't say that they are *Ash'aira*. First, we need to talk about who do we agree that are from *al-Ash'airah*? Who do we agree that are from the? *Ash'airah*! Just because somebody agrees with a group of people in a matter, does that make them part of that group? This is a question we need to ask (. . .) And I asked him [referring to the person he is debating] a question he never answered it. And he will never! Where did Imam Ibn Hajar ever say 'I'm an *Ash'ari*?' Where did Imam al-Nawawi ever say 'I'm an *Ash'ari*'? Where did Imam al-Bayhaqi ever say 'I'm an *Ash'ari*?' Bring me one statement of theirs. How you're gonna speak for them? Ibn Hajar he knows himself. And he never ever said 'I'm an *Ash'ari*'. *Wa la al-Nawawi! Wa la al-Bayhaqi!* [And neither did al-Nawawi. Nor al-Bayhaqi]. You choose to force it under their names.[20]

His stance on Ash'arism is also at the origin of another debate between him and other claimants to the *Ash'ari* tradition: the Deobandis of Bradford, who learn under a Shaykh Mohammad Yasir. Yasir uploaded videos entitled the 'True creed of the *Salaf*' in Spring 2014, to which Hassan replied with a series of videos of his own entitled 'Responses to the mistakes of *Hanafi Fiqh*

channel'. The students of Yasir then posted written replies to his video in their own forum, after having started the debate on Facebook, and the realisation that some of their messages were getting erased. The person who started the thread wrote:

> Many of the comments that brothers had left in reply to him were deleted and upon being questioned why they were, there was no response.

The students then carried on:

> It is not about the *furu'* in *aqidah*. One may differ in *furu'* but in *Asl* they are *Ash'ari*'s as they did not ascribe place to Allah as Allah exist before He created place and they believed Allah is not in a direction. This is contrary to wahhabi *aqidah*.
>
> (. . .) Also for example imam an nawawi was a teacher in *Dar al Hadith* in *al-Shaam* which had a *shart* (condition) that one had to be an *ashari* before being allowed to teach *hadith*. What makes one an *ashari*, what did they have to believe? They did *tafweed* and *Ta'wiel* like all *asharis* do which *salafis* see as big deviations.
>
> Stop lying about these great *Ash'ari* Imams just because you depend on them and have no own Imams in the important sciences.
>
> Ash'ari's never put logic before revelation that is a big lie. Mu'tazila put logic before revelation.
>
> Ash'ari's say: there is no contradiction between our logic and revelation and see the mind and revelation both as separate sources.
>
> This shows you have never read anything about this topic and you are just blindly following the lies of public speakers who are also blindly following the *salafi shuyukh* who dont read books and ascribe many lies upon the

Ummah. The *Ummah* is *ashari*. What is the context of your quotes [?] [A]s many imams quote often some opinion just to refute it.[21]

The statement 'The *Ummah* is *ashari*' shows that this group is defending the traditional vision of history, whereby the majority of scholars were of *Ash'ari* obedience, and it shows that this conflict is having repercussion on the community today. This conversation provides an example of how quietist Salafism is disrupting and stirring up acrimonious debates. It is perpertuating a massive undermining of traditional Sunnism in a way that leaves little accommodation with the rest of the community and which antagonises a person with the rest of the community.

Some consequences of this debate

The Khalas blog

The Khalas blog, hosted by Wordpress, was written by a man whose pen-name is Abdul-Quddus. He subtitles his blog as follows: 'A former convert to Islam turned apostate, ex-muslim, freethinker, born-again atheist, and vegetarian gone wild' (Figure 6.1). The blog itself is quite short; it consists of only three posts, all written in March 2007. It was still online in August 2016, with a 2009 note from the author saying that he will not update the blog anymore, but that he will leave it online as a testimonial of what happened to him (see Figure 6.1). The first post is entitled 'I left Islam'. It is an account of the author's 'Journey through Islam', as he puts it. In it, 'Abdul-Quddus reveals that he left Islam because he discovered that the god he was asked to worship was no more than another idol with a face, hands, eyes, a shin and feet, sitting over a Throne, all things which, he says, do not make this god any different from an idol. He says:

Figure 6.1 Khalas Blog – March 2008.

My expectations of a Supreme Being was in contrast to the
conventional god of Prophet Muhammad. I yearned for a
deity that was transcendent, incomparable, and an
indefinable holy unable to be conceptualized. To my
discovery, the Islaamic deity was actually the generic
anthropomorphic Sky Father abound in popular mythology.
He was afflicted with psychological infirmities such as
megalomania, melancholy, and malevolence (…) I could
not worship a God that changed. As just another idol,
Allaah was depicted and contained in the literary work of
al-Qur'aan. According to one *hadeeth* (Sahih Bukhari:

Volume 8, Book 74, Number 246), the Islaamic God created Aadam upon His *soorah* (form, shape, image), sixty cubits in height. Allaah rested upon His Throne (*arsh*) near His Footstool (*kursi*). He claimed to have an Eye (20:39), a Shin (68:42), a Face (55:27), a Foot (Sahih Bukhari: Volume 9, Book 93, Number 541), even both Right and Left Hands (39:67) (...) Discovering Allaah to be as mythical as the elephant-god Ganesha or temper tantrum Yahweh was a devastating blow to my heart. Relying on *tawheed*, the initial attraction to Islaam, was ineffectual, for I now discerned Allaah as fictitious like the rest of the idols. The god of Islaam, likely just Muhammad's alter-ego, displayed masculinity, anger, indecision, misogyny, and other moral weaknesses unbefitting of a majestic deity.[22]

Here, we can see that this very issue of the Attributes of God was deemed so important that he left Islam when he read literal translations of the Qur'an[23] which did not offer a description of God which was befitting to the perfect Being. This example shows us that the issue of the Attributes of God and their meaning is still of importance today. From his own personal account, it is understood that 'Abdul-Quddus most probably did not hear of the *Ash'aris*, or of their teachings. The creed of Islam as presented by al-Ash'ari and Maturidi scholars is the polar opposite of the definition that 'Abdul-Quddus has described. As we mentioned earlier, *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars, throughout history, have condemned the practice of taking the verses and *hadith* reports according to their literal meaning when this literal meaning leads to anthropomorphism. Their reason for doing so is precisely because of their belief that God does not change, is not limited, is not a body and is not in a specific place, be it the sky or elsewhere. This does not seem to be what 'Abdul-Quddus had learned, and he does not seem aware that there are *Ash'ari* scholars who do interpret those ambiguous texts and provide explanations for

them. This is an example of how the rhetoric of the Salafists is trying to replace Sunni teachings developed by al-Ash'ari. Although 'Abdul-Quddus says of himself that he did not belong to any particular sect, his references and the way he describes his friends are compliant with the teachings of Salafists. In spite of all the research he admits to have done, he managed to not come across the explanations of *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars regarding those ambiguous verses. This means that, in his particular case, the only vision of history he was aware of was that of the Salafists. It appears that the Muslim community would benefit as a whole if there were more scholars trained in theological dialectics and other domains. In this specific case, having an *Ash'ari* scholar nearby might not have changed the outcome for 'Abdul-Quddus, but at least he would have managed to hear a presentation of the creed of Islam which would have answered his questions.

A Christian response to Salafist theology

The consequences of the definition of the Attributes of God of the Salafists can also be seen in the way some Christian apologists have reacted to it, especially those in charge of the website entitled answering-islam.org and other individuals, such as David Wood, who has become famous for debating Muslims. These apologists highlight what they consider a contradiction between advocating that God is One and that He does not resemble His creations, as a way to condemn other beliefs such as Christianity, but then at the same time advocating that God would have two feet, a shin, and be in a place. The Aramaic Broadcasting Network, known as ABNSAT, founded by two Iraqi missionaries settled in the USA, and whose stated aim is 'for more Muslims to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord', had a live phone-in programme on the theme 'Jesus or Muhammad', where David Wood said: 'If Allah can be on a Throne, why can't He be, why can't He enter into this creation and be in a certain place?'[24] as a way of condemning what he believes to be Islamic theology.

On that same programme, he is sometimes joined by Sam Shamoun, another known Christian apologist who wrote articles against Bassam Zawadi, the man behind the response website 'answering-chrisitanity.com', set up in 1998. In one of these articles, he quotes from a formerly quite popular Salafist website of questions and answers (islamqa.com) on the issue of the Attributes of God. He even mentions that he chose this article because it is written by one of the figures that Bassam Zawadi considers as a scholar, and he calls Bassam Zawadi 'a *Salafi*'. In this article, he writes:

> Lest Zawadi try to deny that this is what Muhammad meant, we will quote some of his own scholars who readily and unapologetically admit that all the pronouns in the above narratives refer back to Allah, i.e. that Allah created Adam in His (Allah's) very own image and length:
> (. . .) The Prophet's words, 'Adam was created in His image' means that Allaah created Adam in His image, for He has a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot, and Adam had a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot'. But that does not mean that these things are exactly the same. There is some similarity, but it is not exactly the same.[25] [Answer translated from Ibn al-Uthaymin's book.][26]

He then finishes:

> This also means that Allah must be a limited, finite being, since he has a body which is bound to the dimensions of time, space and place. Therefore, according to the teachings of Muhammad, Allah cannot be an all-powerful or all-knowing deity, nor is he a god who transcends creation, since he is composed of a body which limits him to space and to a particular place.[27]

Salafists typically argue that they are but repeating what God has revealed. If the Christian asked for a proof other than the Qur'an, what would the Salafists say, especially as the Christian may say 'I do not yet believe in the Qur'an so give me another proof?' This is where Ash'aris advocate using arguments such as the fact that the Creator is entirely different from His creations and therefore whatever is shared and common to all creations, such as having a beginning, having some sort of shape and/or colour, and being in a place, do not apply to Him. Therefore, one other effect of the development of this literalist view and definition of God by the Salafists is that it pushes further away from the masses access to the classical definition of God by the Sunnis, and the arguments made by *Ash'ari* scholars in order to promote monotheism. In contrast, they push a literalist understanding which does not withstand scrutiny in a debate with Christians on the Reality of God.[28]

The theology of IS and some of its supporters

There are more and more studies and analyses of extremists' literature, due to IS publishing monthly magazines or leaving behind school books in towns where they have been defeated, and other sources. Only a portion of that material, however, deals directly with the belief in God. There are more *fatwa*s trying to justify the killing of innocents in non-Muslim lands, and other such issues that are directly addressing issues around the use of violence and living in non-Muslim countries, etc. However, there are some examples of what the stance of extremists, such as IS or al-Muhajirun, is towards the issue of the interpretation of the Attributes of God. In keeping with Wahhabism's definition, they are opposed to interpretation and they take all these texts literally. For example, in a short pamphlet entitled 'Our Creed', published by IS, the group defines their approach as follows:

> And we do not commit heresy against the Almighty's names or the Exalted's qualities, but we affirm them for Him just as

they came in the Book and authentic *Sunnah* without *takyif* [saying how], *tamthil* [giving a resemblance], *ta'wil* [interpreting] or *ta'til* [negating].[29]

Negating resemblance and interpretation in the same sentence is specific to the Salafists and those who embrace their vision of history. The *Ash'ari* traditional position is to negate all of these but interpretation.

Abdullah al-Faisal (mentioned in Chapter 4), a supporter of al Muhajirun and IS, said, in his series of lectures called 'Let's call a spade a spade', part 2:

Who are the *Ashaa'ira* of today? They are the *Sufi*, *Berailvis*, *Shia*, Tablighi Jamaat. The *Ashaa'ira* deny that Allah (swt) has two hands. And they call you a wahabi and that you give Allah human body parts. We say to them, 'Allah doesn't have a body, so we don't give Him human body parts. What Allah has is a *dhaat* (Allah's person). It is *shirk* to use a body to describe Allah (swt). Therefore Allah has a face, two eyes and two hands. To deny that Allah has two hands is contradicting the Quran. Because Allah said in 38:75: (Allah) said: "O Iblis (Satan)! What prevents you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with Both My Hands. Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the highly exalted?"' (Sad 38:75).

We say to the *Ashaa'ira* the clock has two hands. But they don't resemble your hands. Likewise, Allah has two hands but they don't resemble our hands. By this means He creates you (in the wombs). There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer (Ash-Shura 42:11). When you deny Allah has two hands, you are not praising Allah. To praise Allah, you have to believe that Allah has two hands but they don't resemble the hands of His creations. That is how you praise Allah.[30]

He uses the same reasoning as all the other groups amongst the Salafists, with regards to the understanding of the Attributes of God. He contributes to spreading this misconception that Ash'aris believe that Allah is everywhere.

Finally, a recent development of the consequence of this debate in extremists' literature is there seems to be an ideological divide within IS supporters as whether to consider Ash'aris as non-Muslims or not. When IS leaders issued a statement to say that they do not consider all Ash'aris to be non-Muslims, it led some members of the organisation to leave and form a dissident group. This group has been studied by Romain Caillet, a French journalist specialised in issues around extremism, in an article entitled 'The radical dissidents of IS' or 'Who are those people that IS is calling "extremists"?'.[31]

This chapter gave us a glimpse of the implications of the debate around the interpretation of the Attributes of God in Islamic theology. It redefines the concept of God in such a way that it makes it harder for non-Muslims to know what Muslims believe in, and on the other hand, it suppresses references for the Muslim community on a larger scale. It appears that the rhetoric of the Salafists proves challenging for Muslims who want to learn their religion and are faced with definitions of God that are diametrically opposed.

CONCLUSION

SCHOLARLY AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

For a redefinition of the theology of the Salafists and of Sunnism

In many current studies, the Salafist factions are taken to share a common creed, but this is frequently a misapprehension. In this work, I have aimed to provide a better understanding of the theology of the Salafists, particularly because this creed has ramifications for political and social trends. This work may help other specialists in the field to reach an accurate representation of the faith of the Salafists.

For example, this is how Wiktorowicz briefly presented the position of the Salafists on the Attributes of God, a position which he identifies as being common to the quietists, the politicos and the jihadists:

> Muslims cannot understand the words literally, because this implies anthropomorphism; but nor should they interpret them as metaphors, because this questions the Qur'an's description of God. Instead, the names and attributes are to be understood without turning to limited human faculties

for specification or comprehension (*bila kayf*, literally without how).[1]

This description is not what the Salafists teach. On the contrary, they consider that the texts are to be taken literally. Before the era of the Salafists, the *Ash'ari* scholars, who wrote critically of anthropomorphism, considered it unacceptable to interpret the ambiguous verses and *hadith* literally, because this would equate to anthropomorphism. On the other hand, the Salafists adopt the literal meaning of these verses and *hadith* while denying being anthropomorphists. Wiktorowicz describes the attitude of the actual *Salaf* scholars, as expressed in Chapter 3, that of neither adopting the literal meanings of these verses and *hadith*, nor attributing them with specific meanings, but not that of the Salafists. They consider that Muslims should understand the words literally. The position of the Salafists on the interpretation of the verses and *hadith* that deal with the Attributes of God is best represented by the works of Ibn 'Uthaymin and Ibn Baz. Al-Uthaymin explains:

> We consider it an obligation to take the text from the Quran and the *Sunnah* on their apparent meaning, and to deal with them in the real sense which befits God.[2]

Ibn Baz adds:

> Interpretation for the attributes [of God] is rejected and not permitted; on the contrary it is an obligation to read through the attributes as they came according to their literal meaning which befits God.[3]

These sentences are the crux of the Salafists' positions. For some scholars, it would appear to be a paradox: al-Qushayri (see Chapter 4), for example, mentions that adopting the literal

meaning of *saq* (literally: shin) (Q 68:42), would undoubtedly constitute anthropomorphism, given that the shin is an organ that consists of flesh, bone and marrow. If one refuses to attribute this meaning of 'shin' to God, then one is not adopting the literal meaning. There does not seem to be a choice between those two options. However, the Salafists' position established here shows that they believe there is a third option: to adhere to the literal meaning without implying anthropomorphism. This is precisely what the scholars who oppose anthropomorphism have denounced since the tenth century.

Another prominent writer also portrays this issue of anthropomorphism and the *Ash'ari* stance on it, with some approximations. Vincenzo Oliveti is the pen name of a Western specialist in Islamic studies. In his book entitled *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences*, he explains:

> The Prophet, in agreement with the Book of Genesis, said: *Verily God created Adam in His own image.* The Salafis, by contrast, are *anthropomorphic*: that is, they remake God in *their* image. They believe that God is on His Throne in Heaven like a man, since the Qur'an describes that He has a *Hand*, a *Side*, a *Face*, a *Throne*, and that He is the *Hearer*, the *Seer*, and so on. This idea is partly a result of the previous point (literalism) and partly due to Ibn Taymiyya, who, referring to a famous *Hadith*, once declared: 'God descends from the Heavens, even as I am descending from this *minbar* (pulpit).' Thus instead of believing that man is made in God's image, the Salafis believe that God is like a man sitting in the sky.[4]

Oliveti gives an accurate description of the belief of the Salafists, but the paragraph above also implies that the belief of the Muslims in general is that man has been made in God's image, which is not the position of the *Ash'ari* scholars. The *hadith* that

Oliveti quotes in this extract, about the Prophet stating that God created Adam in His image, is considered an ambiguous text that requires interpretation and cannot be taken literally.[5] As described earlier, the *Ash'ari* scholars do not consider that humans have been made in the image of their God, for they do not believe that God has an image in the first place. The *Ash'ari* and *Maturidi* scholars have explained that God has no shape, colour, form, volume or image and that attributing these to God is blasphemous.

In his chapter of Wahhabi beliefs and doctrine, Ross Valentine's account of Wahhabi society mentions, however, that: 'Wahhabism is firmly embedded in the Sunni tradition of Islam, and as such it teaches basic orthodox Muslim doctrine and belief'.[6] As we have seen, traditional Islamic teachings on belief emphasise that the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an in relation to the Attributes of God is sometimes compulsory and this is completely negated by the Salafists.

Another example can be found in Aymenn Jawad's notes on the creed of IS. When commenting on the notion of 'not saying how (denying *takyif*) and not interpreting (no *ta'wil*)', he writes:

> A standard formula. In brief, *takyif* means description of God's attributes in such and such manner, *tamthil* means likening to God's creation, *ta'wil* means allegorical interpretation, and *ta'til* denial.[7]

The combination of denying a 'how' and denying interpretation is specific to the worldview of those who consider interpretation to be forbidden. It is a standard feature of Salafist literature, but it is not a mainstream Sunni position. These examples show that there is a great need to reassess the way we define the Salafists' approach to the Attributes of God.

There is also a need to rethink the meaning of Sunnism. If classifying the Salafists as Sunnis, one needs to remember that the

Salafists' definition of Sunnism is wholly antagonistic with that of the traiditonal Sunnis. Given that the Salafists differ substantially with the Sunni vision of history, this should motivate a reassessment of the accuracy of classifying the Salafists as Sunnis. In lieu of this re-examination, it is not sufficient simply to describe Salafists as 'extreme Sunnis' or 'narrow-minded Sunnis'. Algar comments that since Salafists are now being described as Sunnis, the latter term has started to mean little more that non-*Shi'i*:

> That Wahhabis are now counted as 'Sunni' is one indication that the term 'Sunni' has come to acquire an extraordinary loose meaning, not extending much beyond recognition of the legitimacy of the first four caliphs (regarded by Sunnis as the Khulafa al-Rashidun ['the Rightly Guided Caliphs']; in fact, it signifies little more than 'non-Shi'i'. Our characterization of Wahhabis as non-Sunni is therefore above all a historical clarification; it has no polemical purpose (. . .)[8]

Despite Algar's polemic tone, his remarks highlight the inconsistency of regarding the Wahhabis as Sunnis. Clearly, there are questions to be raised about the way in which the Salafists have been described in academic literature and in specialised articles in the press. Researchers must question how much Salafist rhetoric has been assimilated and accepted as true without critical inquiry. This reassessment may prove to be a lengthy and difficult process, considering that Saudi Arabia and its clerics are seen as 'defenders of Sunnism' against a *Shi'i* axis, which is represented in geo-politically important parts of the Middle East, including Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. Nevertheless, this must take place if we are to understand Wahhabism accurately. The mere fact that Salafists are now seen as the primary Sunni voice on the international scene reveals how the movement has succeeded in altering external perceptions in its favour. In an article published in the French

daily newspaper '*Libération*', the Tunisian philosopher Mezri Haddad summed up the situation in 2008 as follows:

> The arrival of the Taliban in power in Afghanistan was a Saudi ideological victory, a Pakistani logistical success, and a consecration of the American strategy. The 9/11 attack changed everything. However, by a bizarre twist of History, instead of triggering the decline of this monarchy (. . .) these events gave a new life to the Saudi regime. In fact, the Wahhabis should thank their fellow citizen and disciple Ben Laden. For the mere reason that, compared to al-Qaeda's barbarism and nihilism, the Wahhabi theocracy now stands as a moderate regime.[9]

This description remains valid today and has been exacerbated by recent developments in the Middle East, such as the Spring 2017 visit of Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia, which strengthened the role of Saudi Arabia in the region and allowed it to cut ties with Qatar, accusing it of funding terrorism, or the CIA's chief, Mike Pompeo, offering the George Tenet Award to Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef for his counter-terrorism work.[10]

Theology and counter-terrorism

The belief in the Attributes of God cannot be linked directly to causing extremism in itself. The profiles of the perpetrators of recent terrorist attacks also seem to suggest that a significant proportion of them knew very little about religion in general, let alone about theology on names and attributes.

However, Salafist theology seems to create an environment that may make uneducated youth more permeable to extreme discourse, as most references from the past are considered misguided for a reason linked to their beliefs.

The confusion that is caused by the Salafist vision of history is reason enough to investigate the impact of this theology upon the cohesion of Muslim communities. Indirectly, this confusion may create an environment in which extremist ideas flourish more readily. This has been encapsulated by the 'American scholar with long experience in Saudi Arabia, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preserve his ability to travel to the kingdom for research', interviewed by Shane for his detailed article on Saudi Arabia, and who said:

> Saudi proselytizing can result in a 'recalibration of the religious center of gravity' for young people (...) which makes it 'easier for them to swallow or make sense of the ISIS religious narrative when it does arrive. It doesn't seem quite as foreign as it might have, had that Saudi religious influence not been there.'[11]

A recent study of Egyptians from a Salafist background who then turned to terrorist activities, by Drevon, the result of four years of interaction and immersion, states that:

> The adoption of *Salafi* jihadi ideational frames finally was facilitated by its shared creed with mainstream Salafism. *Salafi* jihadi youths do not consider that they have adopted a new religious creed but insist that they merely have endorsed a new understanding of the political ramifications of the *Salafi* religious creed. In agreement with many academic studies on Salafism, they posit that only their *manhaj* [method] has changed, while their *'aqida* [religious creed] has remained the same. They additionally maintain that the *Salafi* jihadi approach to Islam is internally more consistent than non-jihadi Salafism, considering that mainstream *Salafi* preachers and scholars similarly excommunicate Muslim rulers who do not apply Islamic

Law comprehensively, but fall short of legitimizing the use of violence against them. Amar insisted:

> If you ask the Salafis in Alexandria, they think that a Muslim who does not rule by the law revealed by God is an apostate. They also believe that jihad is an Islamic duty. The difference is that they don't follow what they preach and always put conditions on armed jihad! Some say that we need a leader [*amir*] to wage jihad, while others add that we need the permission of our parents or that the restoration of the Caliphate is a pre-condition. But jihad is *fard 'ayn* [an individual duty]! Most of these sheikhs are hypocrites. They know that we are following the Qur'an and *Sunna* while they are not.[12]

The approach according to which it would be the non-violent individuals from the Salafist spectrum who can best help in the fight againt terrorism might yield some results. However, if their worldview is the same, if the teachings are antagonising the main body of the Muslims and the world at large, doubts may be raised about how successful this method will be in the long term. There certainly is a need to oppose jihadists with arguments and references that they themselves accept. However, by so doing, we might promote a faction which, ultimately, has a very different worldview from that of the majority of the Muslims that it claims to represent. This should be taken into account when one realises that the quietists sometimes struggle to address the arguments of the extremists properly.

This situation is affecting Muslims, not simply because they remain the first victims of the attacks of the terrorists on a global scale, but also because a significant part of their intellectual heritage is being gradually taken away in the midst of these events. In terms of Islam's worldview, how to define God and how to project oneself within Islamic history, the Sunnis are now challenged like never before. They cannot blame Western police

officers, other government representatives and even academics from all sides, for setting the agenda towards cooperation with non-violent Salafis to achieve their aim of reducing the number of people who are likely to kill themselves and others in the name of Islam. However, while this is happening, there is a doctrinal violence which is being spread in Muslim communities and which consists of accepting the notion that most of the Muslim scholars throughout history were deviated and misguided, as far as their creed was concerned. This may, in turn, disorientate some of the youth, and then make them prey to more simplification, falsification, and brainwashing by people with sinister motives. However, if one takes into account a more long-term approach, perhaps then, and only then, one may realise that it might actually be in the interest of all, even for those who are not Sunnis, or Muslim for that matter, to address the issue of the surreptitious replacement of the notion of Sunnism.

A need for more exploration of classical Islamic sources and concepts

Finally, the book has highlighted the need for more research into the dogmatics of Sunnism and more translations of classical works by classical Sunni scholars that the Salafists have now cast as heretics in the creed. For example, the principle of 'without a how' (*bila-kayf*) is still explained in many cases in academic literature by 'not knowing the how' as opposed to 'there is no how to the Attributes of God', which is a very different approach. To say that God does not have a 'how', a 'manner', precludes the idea that God has a shape, a place, a colour, or the like. To say that we do not know 'how God is' implies that He has one of those characteristics of shape, place, colour and the like, but that it is not known exactly 'how' they are. We also noted the example of al-Shahrastani who, in his description of the beliefs of an anthropomorphist, carefully works his sentences so as not to declare that the

anthropomorphists he denounces in his book '*al-Milal*' worship 'God'. Instead, when describing the creed of one anthropomorphist leader, he uses the phrase '*ma'buduhu*', which means 'what he worships', as he does not consider that something described with organs and a place should be called 'God'.[13] All of the examples seen demonstrated that the precision that some scholars used when discussing the Muslim creed is still largely unwritten about, when compared to other areas of studies dealing with Islam. The current interest in groups claiming to fight in the name of Islam has sparked more interest for this religion's norms and phenomena and how they fit in within broader theoretical concepts. However, some of this attention can also be transferred to, for example, the study of how Muslims learn the basics of their beliefs (mostly orally, and now frequently on the internet, for example) and how this impacts on their lives; or to the analysis of specific points of belief and how they are debated today, especially with the existence of opposing claims on almost every subject. Studying further the theological tenets of Islam in general, and of Sunnism in particular, is even more necessary now that it is being gradually and systematically altered without much realisation from the outside world.

APPENDIX

TWO DETAILED INTERPRETATIONS BY AL-RAZI

Two examples of detailed interpretations by al-Razi have been translated recently, and have been copied here. The following pattern is used: firstly, al-Razi explains why the literal meaning of the ambiguous verse on the Attribute of God cannot be retained, then he offers some possible interpretations.

On the verse:

Wa li-Allah al-mashriq wa al-maghrib; fa-aynama tuwallu fa-thamma wajh Allah, inna Allah wasi' 'alim (Q 2:115), literally: 'The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His face. God is all pervading and all knowing', al-Razi explains:

Fourth issue. The verse is one of the strongest proofs for refuting corporealism (*tajsim*) and affirming [God's] transcendence (*tanzih*). This is made clear in two ways:

First: God says *And to God belong the east and the west*. He makes it clear that these two directions belong to Him. This is so because direction is something that in the imagination (*wahm*) extends in length, width and depth. Everything that is so consists of divided parts and everything that is divided is composite and compound, and everything

that is so must necessarily have a creator and an originator. This proof is a general one concerning all directions, [by which] I mean, what is above and what is beneath; by this, it is proved that God is the Creator (*khaliq*) of all directions and a creator necessarily precedes creation. The Creator (*bari'*) therefore, before the creation of the world, transcended (*kana munazzahan*) all direction and [spatial] spheres (*ahyaz*); and it is inevitably necessary that He remain thus after the creation of the world, since it is impossible for realities (*haqa'iq*) and essences (*mahiyyat*) to change.

Second: God says *whithersoever you turn there is the face of God*. If God were a physical body and had a corporeal face, the His Face would have been specified by a certain side and a certain direction, in which case His saying *whithersoever you turn there is the face of God* would not have been true. And as God specifies this [by explicitly mentioning it], we know that He transcends corporeality.

(. . .) Therefore, interpretation [in the case of this verse] is necessary, and [such interpretation] has different aspects.[1]

On the verse 'Nur samawati wa al-ard (literally the light of the heavens and the earth)' (Q 24:35):

Know that in Arabic the term 'light' (*nur*) is used for that phenomenon which the sun, the moon and fire diffuse over the ground, [over] walls and [over] other things. According to various different points of view it is impossible that this phenomenon be a god (. . .) The second [point of view] is that, whether we say that light is a bodily form or is something present in the body, [the fact remains that] it is divisible. [This is] because if it a bodily form then it must be divisible, and if it is present in it [the body], then [its very] presence in that which is divisible [means it too] is divisible. According to two accounts, light is divisible, and everything

that is divisible requires the existence of its part in order to itself to exist. Each one of its parts changes it, and each required part requires [parts] other than itself in order to exist. That which requires [the existence of] another is made possible by its essence, which is occasioned by [something] other than itself. Thus, light is something that is brought about [by another] and so is not a god. The third [point of view] [is that] were this tangible light to be God, it could not vanish because it is impossible that God ever vanish.

The fourth [point of view] [is that] if this tangible light arrives when the sun and stars appear, and this is not possible for God [since He is ever-present] (. . .) God's statement *And appointed the shadows and light* (Q 6:1). This states unequivocally that the essential nature of light is something that God has created, so it is impossible that God [Himself] be a light. It is established that [this] requires explanation and the religious experts mention various differing points of view about it.

The first [point of view] is that light causes [things] to become visible, and since guidance and light share this sense [i.e., since they are both understood to perform this function], it is correct that the name 'light' is often bestowed on 'guidance'. The second [point of view] is that the meaning [of the verse] is that He [God], is truly just, competent and enlightening ruler of the heavens and the earth. He describes Himself like this just as the learned leader is described as being the light of [his] country. If their ruler rules well he is for them [i.e. for the inhabitants of a given region] like the light that guides to the ways of the right path.[2]

NOTES

Introduction

1. See for more information *'Usra Al Al-Shaykh Tasdar Bayanan Yanfidu Maza'im Ameer Qatar'*, *Okaz*, 28 May 2017 or 'Descendants of Saudi Wahhabism Founder Distance Themselves from Qatar', *Reuters*, 28 May 2017.

2. For examples of the study of Salafists' ideology, see Shiraz Maher, *Salafi Jihadism, the History of an Idea* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016) and Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Lav, for example, gives a detailed account of theological arguments from original sources in Arabic.

3. See, for example, the fascinating accounts of David Thomson, *Les Français Jihadistes* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2014) and Wassim Nasr, *Etat Islamique, Le Fait Accompli* (Paris: Plon, 2016).

4. *Lisan Al-'Arab*, 15 vols (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), vol. 6, p. 331. Ibn Manzur (1233–1311 CE/630–711 AH) is famous for having condensed five earlier dictionaries into this concise text. For more details on him and his works see *EI [2]*, vol. 3, p. 864.

5. Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Taj Al-'Arus Min Jawahir Al-Qamus*, 2nd. ed., 10 vols (Binghazi: Dar Libya li-al-nashr wa al-tawzi', 1966), vol. 6, p. 143. *Taj al-'arus* is al-Zabidi's commentary (d.1205 AH/1791 CE) on the *Qamus* by the linguist al-Fayruzabadi (d.817 AH/1415 CE). His other main commentary is *Ithaf al-sada al-muttaqin* where he explores al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. More information on al-Murtada al-Zabidi can be found in *EI [2]*, vol. 7, p. 445. *Ithaf al-sada al-muttaqin* is also quoted in 3.5.1.2.1: *Kitab Ithaf Al-Sada Al-Muttaqin Bi-Sharh Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din*, 14 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1989).

6. *Taj Al-'Arus*, vol. 6, p. 143. There are more details on this type of business dealings in *EI ²*, vol. 8, p. 899.

7. Literally 'We made them a People of the past', i.e., here 'a lesson and example'.

8. A.J. Wensinck, *Al-Mu'Jam Al-Mufahras Li-Alfaz Al-Hadith Al-Nabawi: 'An Al-Kutub Al-Sitta Wa-'an Musnad Al-Darimi Wa-Muwatta' Malik Wa-Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 1936), pp. 504–505.

9. The version mentioned here can be found in the narrations of Ibn Hanbal: Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (Beirut: 'Alam al-kutub, 1998), *hadith* 4163, 9307, 10214, 20074, 148, al-Bukhari *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dar al-'Ulum al-'insaniyya, 1993), 6064, 317, 508 and Abu al-Husayn ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-turath al-'arabi, 1972), hadith 214.

   The main differences between the various versions of this *hadith* are whether the Prophet said 'the best people of this community are' or 'my' community (*khayru hadhihi l-'umma* or *khayri 'ummati*): Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, *hadith* 18539, 20195, Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith 210, 13, 15 Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih Wa-Huwa Sunan Al-Tirmidhi* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1999), hadith 2222, al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, hadith 3450; or 'the best people are' (*khayru l-nas*'): Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, *hadith* 3594, 963, 4140, 216, 18237, 20021, Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Kitab Al-Sunan Al-Kubra* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 2001), hadith 4732, 5977, al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih Wa-Huwa Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, *hadith* 2221, 302, 303, 3859 al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, hadith 6065, 509, 3451, Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith 212. Some are phrased like an answer that the Prophet gave to the question 'Who are the best people?': al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, *hadith* 6282, Muslim *Sahih Muslim*, *hadith* 211, 16. A synopsis of the different versions can also be found in Wensinck, *Al-Mu'Jam Al-Mufahras Li-Alfaz Al-Hadith Al-Nabawi: 'An Al-Kutub Al-Sitta Wa-'an Musnad Al-Darimi Wa-Muwatta' Malik Wa-Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, vol. 5, p. 372, but it should be noted that it is not complete, as some versions are available in Abu Dawud's collection, although absent from this list: Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, 5 vols (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1983; repr., Hums, Muhammad Ali al-Sayyid).

10. For the versions where the narrator (Abu Hurayra and others) is not sure about the number of times the Prophet said 'and those who followed' (i.e., whether he said it two or three times) see *Musnad*, 9307, 10214, 20074, 148, 195.

11. Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, *Al-Fath Al-Rabbani Fi Tartib Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal Al-Shaybani Wa-Ma'Ahu Kitab Bulugh Al-Amani Fi Asrar Al-Fath Al-Rabbani*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-turath al-'arabi, 1976), vol. 23, p. 222.

12. Ahmad ibn 'Ali Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1981), vol. 7, p. 7.

13. Ahmad ibn 'Umar al-Qurtubi, *Al-Mufhim Li-Ma Ashkala Min Talkhis Kitab Muslim*, 7 vols (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir 1996), vol. 6, p. 486.

14. Muhammad Shams al-Haqq al-'Azimabadi, *'Awn Al-Ma'Bud: Sharh Sunan Abi Dawud Wa Huwa Mukhtasar Ghayat Al-Maqsud Fi Hall Sunan Abi Dawud*, 3rd ed., 13 vols (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1979), vol. 12, p. 226.

15. Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*; al-Qurtubi, *Al-Mufhim Li-Ma Ashkala Min Talkhis Kitab Muslim*, vol. 6, p. 486.

16. al-Qadi 'Iyad Ibn Musa, *Sharh Sahih Muslim Li-Al-Qadi 'Iyad, Al-Musamma Kamal Al-Mu'Lim Bi-Fawa'id Muslim* (al-Mansura: Dar al-Wafa' li-al-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr wa-al-tawzi', 1998), vol. 5, p. 571, Abu 'Abd Allah al-'Ubi (or al-'Aybi?), *Sharh Sahih Muslim Al-Musamma Bi-Ikmal Ikmal Al-Mu'Allim* (Riyadh: Maktabah Tubariyya), p. 357.

17. More information on al-Nawawi in Chapter 2.

18. Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim Bi-Sharh Al-Imam Muhyi Al-Din Yahya Ibn Sharaf Al-Musamma Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahih Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj.*, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dar al-'Ulum al-'Insaniyya, 1997), vol. 5, p. 248.

19. Ali Merad has listed different early meanings of the word *salaf* such as 'the wives of the Prophet', for example: *EI* [2], vol. 4, p. 149.

20. Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims, History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), pp. 148–9.

21. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti is studied in more detail in Chapter 4.

22. Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, *Al-Salafiyya: Marhala Zamaniyya Mubaraka La-Madhhab Islami* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1998), p. 9.

23. Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq Duwaysh, *Fatawa Al-Lajna Al-Da'ima Li-Al-Buhuth Al-'Ilmiyya Wa Al-Ifta*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Maktaba al-'Ubaykan: ri'asa idara al-buhuth al-'ilmiyya wa al-ifta, 1992), vol. 2, p. 166.

24. Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim Bi-Sharh Al-Imam Muhyi Al-Din Yahya Ibn Sharaf Al-Musamma Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahih Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1994), vol. 5, p. 248.

25. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, p. 6. The article *Islah* in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* mentions that the last companion was agreed to be Anas ibn Malik: *EI* [2], vol. 4, p. 149.

26. For more on Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi see *EI* [2], vol. 10, p. 101.

27. Also called 'Maliki the Younger', Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani was one of the major actors in the spread of the teachings of Malik ibn Anas in Tunisia (where the town of Qayrawan is located), and beyond. For more information on him see *EI ²*, vol. 3, p. 695.

28. Translation by Abdassamad Clarke. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani, *A Madinan View on the Sunnah, Courtesy, Wisdom, Battles and History*, trans. Abdassamad Clarke (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1999), pp. 24–5.

29. Ibid., pp. 25–6.

Chapter 1   Introduction to Islamic Theological Issues

1. Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 88.

2. The theological explanations, debates and refutations that Muslim theologians such as al-Ash'ari became known for, were called '*kalam*'. There is a lot of speculation as to the origins of this term, which originally refers to the attribute of 'speech' of God. Some said theology became known as such precisely because one of the very first topics of theologians was the nature of the speech of God. Others said that it was because theology entailed long discussions (i.e., long speeches) on intricate topics, hence the name. Other interpretations were also given.

3. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, p. 89.

4. Ibid., p. 89.

5. Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the near East, 600–1800*, Themes in Islamic History; V. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 189.

6. Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi was an *Ash'ari Shafi'i* scholar settled in Nishapur, where he became a renowned teacher. For more information on him see *EI ²*, vol. 1, p. 909.

7. Abu Mansur 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (Al-Fark Bain Al-Firak) Being the History of the Various Philosophic Systems Developed in Islam*, trans. Kate Chambers Seelye (New York: Amc Press, Inc, 1966), p. 7.

8. Such as al-Azhar in Cairo, Zaytuna in Tunis and Qarawiyyun in Morocco. An example of this can be seen in the list of table of contents of the different books used in al-Azhar made by Louis Gardet, *Introduction À La Théologie Musulmane: Essai De Théologie Comparée*, vol. 37, Etudes De Philosophie Médiévale (Paris: Vrin, 1948), pp. 139–84.

9. What follows is a condensed version of arguments and examples which can be found in books on *Ash'ari* theology, such as Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn

Isma'il al-Ash'ari, *The Theology of Al-Ash'Ari: The Arabic Texts of Al-Ash'Ari's Kitab Al-Luma' and Risalat Istihsan Al-Khawd Fi 'Ilm Al-Kalam*, trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Beyrouth: Impr. catholique, 1953); Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *Kitab Al-Tamhid Al-Awa'il Wa-Talkhis Al-Dala'il* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-kutub al-thaqafiyya, 1987); 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allah al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1950); Abu Mansur 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum* (Beirut: Dar al-afaq al-jadida, 1973); and Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din*, 6 vols (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'arabi; repr., 1938), vol. 1. For detailed landmarking academic studies on Ash'ari theology and related issues, see Daniel Gimaret, *La Doctrine D'al-Ash'Ari* (Paris: Cerf, 1990); *Les Noms Divins En Islam: Exégèse Lexicographique Et Théologique* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988) and Michel Allard, *Le Problème Des Attributs Divins Dans La Doctrine D'al-as'Ari Et De Ses Premiers Grands Disciples*, vol. 28, Recherches Publiées Sous La Direction De L'institut De Lettres Orientales De Beyrouth (Beyrouth: Impr. catholique, 1965). For the influence of *kalam* discourse on other fields such as philosophy, see Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (London: Duckworth, 2003), part II.

10. *Kullu mawjud siwa Allah ta'ala wa sifatihi*:al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 17; *kullu shay'ghayr Allah:* Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, p. 315; *ma siwa Allah:* Mas'ud ibn 'Umar al-Taftazani, *Sharh Al-'Aqa'id Al-Nasafiyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-azhariyya li-al-turath, 2000), p. 33.

11. al-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*, vol. 2, p. 7; al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 32.

12. For the various possible meanings of *khalaqa* see al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Taj Al-'Arus*, vol. 6, pp. 335–8; Ibn Manzur, *Lisan Al-'Arab*, vol. 10, pp. 85–92.

13. On the belief that the world must have a beginning, see, for example: al-Baqillani, *Kitab Al-Tamhid Al-Awa'il Wa-Talkhis Al-Dala'il*, pp. 41–3.

14. On the necessity of God being different from His creations, see, for example al-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*, vol. 2, p. 7; and al-Baqillani, *Kitab Al-Tamhid Al-Awa'il Wa-Talkhis Al-Dala'il* p. 44.

15. This *hadith* is the story of a group of Muslims from Yermen who travelled to ask the Prophet what the first creation was. Before answering their question directly, the Prophet started with the reminder that God existed and nothing else existed (*kana Allah wa lam yakun shay' ghayruh*). The

hadith is mentioned by Taj al-Din Abu-Nasr 'Abd-al-Wahhab Ibn-'Ali Ibn-'Abd-al-Kafi al-Subki, *Tabaqat Al-Shafi'Iyya Al-Kubra*, 1. Tabà. ed. (Cairo: Matba'at 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1964), vol. 3, p. 364 and Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi, 'Kitab Al-Asma' Wa Al-Sifat', in *Furqan Al-Qur'an*, ed. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Kawthari (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-turath al-'arabi).

16. For the impossibility of change being an Attribute of God, see al-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*, vol. 2, p. 9; and al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 44.

17. For the division of the worlds between bodies and accidents, see Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, pp. 315–16; al-Baqillani, *Kitab Al-Tamhid Al-Awa'il Wa-Talkhis Al-Dala'il*, p. 37; al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 17.

18. Atom is used here for *jawhar*, which is used by Ash'ari and Maturidi scholars to refer to the smallest indivisible particle, and not in the physicist's definition, according to which the atom can be divided further into electrons and neutrons.

19. al-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*, vol. 2, pp. 9–10.

20. E.g., Binyamin Abrahamov, 'The Bi-La Kayfa Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology', *Arabica* 42, no. 3 (1995): pp. 376–7; Gimaret, *La Doctrine D'al-Ash'Ari*, p. 342; Duncan Black MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory*, The Semitic Series; (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1903), p. 147. For other studies of anthropomorphism, see Josef van Ess, *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam. The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University* (Tempe, AZ: Dept. of Religious Studies, Arizona State University, 1988).

21. The principle is sometimes spelled out slightly differently: *kullu tawahamahu mutawaham bi-al-jahl annahu kadhalik, fa-al-'aql yadullu 'ala annahu bi-khilafihi*: Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri, *Al-Risala Al-Qushayriyya: Wa Bi-Al-Hamish Muntakhabat Min Sharh Shaykh Al-Islām Abi Yahya Zakariya Al-Ansari Al-Shafi'i*, 2 ed. (Egypt: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1959), p. 6.

22. The concept according to which God exists without a place is central to the teachings of Sunni scholars. They reiterate this principle as an important tenet of the Islamic faith: Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, p. 321; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 13, p. 358; al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din*, vol. 1, p. 155; 'Ali ibn al-Hasan Ibn 'Asakir, *Tabyin Kadhib Al-Muftari Fi-Ma Nusiba Ila Al-Imam Abi*

Al-Hasan Al-Ash'Ari (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-'arabi, 1979), p. 150; al-Bayhaqi, 'Kitab Al-Asma' Wa Al-Sifat,' p. 400.

23. Strong condemnations going as far as not considering as non-Muslims people with such views can be found in: Abu Mansur 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Kitab Usul Al-Din* (Istanbul: Madrasa al-ilahiyyat bi-dar al-funun, 1928), p. 337; Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1985; repr., Cairo 1961), p. 105; Maymun ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi, *Tabsira Al-Adilla: Fi Usul Al-Din 'Ala Tariqa Al-Imam Abi Mansur Al-Maturidi* (Damascus: al-Ma'had al-'ilmi al-faransi li-al-dirasat al-arabiyya bi-Dimashq, 1990), vol. 1, p. 169; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Ashbah Wa Al-Naza'ir Fi Qawa'Id Wa Furu' Fiqh Al-Shafi'Iyya* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1959), p. 488; Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi, *Daf' Shubah Al-Tashbih Bi-Akuff Al-Tanzih* (Cairo: Maktaba al-kulliya al-azhariyya, 1991), p. 66; Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, *Al-Minhaj Al-Qawim: Sharh Shihab Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami 'Ala Al-Muqaddima Al-Hadramiyya Fi Al-Fiqh Al-Shafi'I*, 3rd ed. (Damascus-Beirut: Mu'assasa 'ulum al-Qur'an, 1987), p. 224; 'Ali ibn Sultan Muhammad al-Qari al-Harawi, *Mirqat Al-Mafatih: Sharh Mishkat Al-Masabih*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992), vol. 3, p. 300.

24. For detailed interpretations on this verse see: Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, 32 vols (Egypt: al-Matba'a al-Bahiyya al-misriyya, 1934), vol. 7, pp. 175–95; Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, 3 ed., 20 in 10 vols ([Cairo]: Dar al-Katib al-'arabi, 1967), vol. 4, pp. 8–19; al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 42; and al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*, vol. 2, pp. 177–9. What follows is a summary of those interpretations. For translations in French of most of the interpretations given by Sunni scholars on ambiguous *hadiths*, see Daniel Gimaret, *Dieu À L'image De L'homme: Les Anthropomorphismes De La Sunna Et Leur Interprétation Par Les Théologiens* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

25. For these definitions of explicit (*muhkam*) and (*mutashabih*) see al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, vol. 4, p. 14 and al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, vol. 7, p. 183.

26. *Hal yandhuruna illa ta'wilah, yawma ya'ti ta'wiluh* (Q 7:53), 'What are they waiting for but the fulfilment of its final Prophecy?'

27. al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, vol. 7, pp. 184–6; al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, vol. 4, pp. 15–17; al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 42 and 'Ala al-din 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi al-Shafi'i al-Khazin al-Baghdadi, *Tafsir*

Al-Khazin Al-Musamma Lubab Al-Ta'wil Fi Ma'Ani Al-Tanzil Wa Bi-Hamishihi Tafsir Al-Baghawi, Al-Ma'Ruf Bi-Ma'Alim Al-Tanzil Li-Abi Muhammad Al-Husayn Ibn Mas'Ud Al-Furra Al-Baghawi Al-Shafi'I, 6 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), vol. 1, p. 321.

28. For the mention of the possibility of reading this verse in two different ways see al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, vol. 7, pp. 188–9; al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, vol. 4, pp. 15–17 and al-Khazin al-Baghdadi, *Tafsir Al-Khazin Al-Musamma Lubab Al-Ta'wil Fi Ma'Ani Al-Tanzil Wa Bi-Hamishihi Tafsir Al-Baghawi, Al-Ma'Ruf Bi-Ma'Alim Al-Tanzil Li-Abi Muhammad Al-Husayn Ibn Mas'Ud Al-Furra Al-Baghawi Al-Shafi'I*, vol. 1, p. 321.

29. al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*, vol 2, pp. 178–9.

Chapter 2   Historical Perceptions

1. al-Bayhaqi, 'Kitab Al-Asma' Wa Al-Sifat'.
2. For more on al-Bayhaqi see *EI* [2] vol. 1, p. 1130.
3. 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allah al-Juwayni, *Al-'Aqida Al-Nizamiyya Fi Al-Arkan Al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 1992).
4. For more information on al-Juwayni, see *EI* [2] vol. 2, p. 605.
5. al-Juwayni, *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*.
6. al-Nasafi, *Tabsira Al-Adilla*.
7. Not to be confused with Najm al-Din al-Nasafi (d.1142) who wrote the treatise entitled 'Aqaid al-Nasafiyya', which, with its commentary by at-Taftazani is among the classical books on the Muslim creed, and he is not either the 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (d.1310) who wrote an exegesis of the Qur'an.
8. al-Shahrastani, *Milal*.
9. For more information on al-Shahrastani see Guy Monnot's article where he raises serious doubts about Steigerwald's theory according to which al-Shahrastani was an Ismaili acting 'undercover' as an *Ash'ari*: *Livre Des Sectes Et Des Religions*, trans. Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, 2 vols (Leuven, Peeters: Unesco, 1986–1993), pp. 3–10; and Diane Steigerwald, *La Pensée Philosophique Et Théologique De Shahrastani (M. 548/1153)* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997).
10. Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn Al-Jawzi's Kitab Akhbar as-Sifat: A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation, Introduction and Notes*, trans. Merlin L. Swartz, vol. 46, Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
11. *Daf' Shubah*.

12. Ibn al-Jawzi mastered many different areas of Islamic knowledge; for more biographical information on him see *EI*² vol. 3, p. 751.

13. 'Izz al-Din 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Sulami, *The Belief of the People of Truth (Al-Mulha Fi I'Tiqad Ahl Al-Haqq)*, trans. Gibril Fouad Haddad, Islamic Doctrines and Beliefs, Volume 3 (Fenton: As-Sunna foundation of America, 1999).

14. Ibid.

15. For more biographical information see *EI*², vol. 9, p. 812.

16. al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*.

17. For more information on al-Nawawi see the detailed introduction of Louis Pouzet to his translation of the 40 *hadith*: Louis Pouzet, *Une Herméneutique De La Tradition Islamique: Le Commentaire Des Arba'Un Al-Nawawiya De Muhyi Al-Din Al-Nawawi*, Langue Arabe Et Pensée Islamique; 13 (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1982), pp. 1–55.

18. Copies used: 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, with Corrections and Augmented Bibliography.*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2nd ed., 3 vols, Bollingen Series: 43 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun – Prolégomènes D'ebn Khaldoun (D'après Le Manuscrit De Paris De 1858)*, 3 vols (Beirut: Maktaba Lubnan, 1970).

19. For more information on Ibn Khaldun see Franz Rosenthal's account in his introduction to the translation of the *Muqaddima*: *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, with Corrections and Augmented Bibliography.*, pp. xxix–lxvii.

20. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

21. For more information on Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani see *EI*², vol. 3, p. 776.

22. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, *Al-Minhaj Al-Qawim: Sharh Shihab Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami 'Ala Al-Muqaddima Al-Hadramiyya Fi Al-Fiqh Al-Shafi'I*.

23. For more information on Zakariyya al-Ansari see *EI*², vol. 11, p. 406.

24. A famous Egyptian scholar specialised in *hadith*, who was also a historian and a biographer.

25. For more information on Ibn Hajar al-Haytami see *EI*², vol. 3, p. 778.

26. al-Qari al-Harawi, *Mirqat Al-Mafatih: Sharh Mishkat Al-Masabih*, 3.

27. Kamal al-Din Ahmad ibn Hasan al-Bayadi, *Isharat Al-Maram Min 'Ibarat Al-Imam* (Cairo: Sharika maktaba wa-matba'a Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa-awladih, 1949).

28. More information on Muhammad Zahid ibn Hasan al-Kawthari (d.1951) above.

29. al-Bayhaqi, 'Kitab Al-Asma' Wa Al-Sifat,' p. 474.

30. al-Juwayni, *Al-'Aqida Al-Nizamiyya Fi Al-Arkan Al-Islamiyya*, p. 32.

31. This is a reference to the Qur'anic verse {3:7} explained earlier.

32. Translation by Paul Walker. 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allah al-Juwayni, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'tiqad* (Reading: Garnet: Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2000), p. 25; for the Arabic see *Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati' Al-Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'Tiqad*, p. 40.

33. al-Nasafi, *Tabsira Al-Adilla*.

34. This is a general statement, as there are indeed some specific interpretations narrated from scholars of the *Salaf* period.

35. Translation mine. al-Nasafi, *Tabsira Al-Adilla*, p. 130.

36. Al-Nasafi is probably referring to a work by Ibn Furak dealing exclusively with the ambiguous *hadith*, where he provides explanations for the most well-known of them: Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan Ibn Furak, *Kitab Mushkil Al-Hadith Wa-Bayanuh*, 2nd ed. (Hayderabad: Matba'a Majlis da'irat al-ma'arif al-'uthmaniyya, 1971).

37. Adapted from the translation by Kazi and Flynn. For the English see Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitab Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal*, trans. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), p. 85; for the Arabic see *Milal*, vol. 1, p. 101.

38. For the English see *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitab Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal*, p. 88; for the Arabic see *Milal*, vol. 1, p. 104.

39. Isma'il ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya Wa Al-Nihaya* (Beirut: Maktaba al-Ma'arif, 1966), vol. 10, p. 327.

40. Translation by Merlin Swartz. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46 p. 133 for the text in English, and p. 23 for the text in Arabic.

41. He is probably referring to the people who follow the Tariqa he belonged to, under the teachings of the *Sufi* masters of his time: Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d.1234) and Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d.1258). Adapted from the translation by Gibril Fouad Haddad. For the Arabic see 'Izz al-Din 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Sulami, *Al-'Aqa'id* (Dar al-Nashr al-islamiyya), 14; for the English see *Al-Mulha*, p. 40.

42. For the Arabic see *Al-'Aqa'id*, p. 15; for the English see *Al-Mulha*, p. 41.

43. Adapted from a translation by 'Abdullah Ibn Hamid 'Ali. al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim Bi-Sharh Al-Imam Muhyi Al-Din Yahya Ibn Sharaf Al-Musamma Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahih Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj*, vol. 6, p. 279. For the English, see Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Attributes of God*, trans. 'Abdullah Ibn Hamid 'Ali (Bristol: Amal Press, 2006), p. 94 note 31. 'Abdullah Ibn Hamid 'Ali translated both the text by Ibn al-Jawzi and the comments on it made by al-Kawthari in his Arabic edition. Al-Kawthari at some point quotes 'Ali al-Qari (d.1605) who quotes

al-Nawawi. This is why the reference for the translation of this passage by al-Nawawi is indicating a book by Ibn al-Jawzi. The translation of the last sentence of the quote is mine as it was not quoted by al-Kawthari and therefore not translated by Ibn Hamid 'Ali.

44. Adapted from the translation by Franz Rosenthal. For the English see Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, with Corrections and Augmented Bibliography*, vol. 3, pp. 65−7; for the Arabic see *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun − Prolégomènes D'ebn Khaldoun (D'après Le Manuscrit De Paris De 1858)*, vol. 3, pp. 50−1.

45. For the English see *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, with Corrections and Augmented Bibliography.*, vol. 3, p. 67; for the Arabic see *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun − Prolégomènes D'ebn Khaldoun (D'après Le Manuscrit De Paris De 1858)*, vol. 3, p. 52.

46. Which must be, here, a reference to Maturidi scholars, who in many cases happen to be *Hanafis*. For this reason, *Hanaf'* theologians may be understood as *Maturidi* theologians.

47. For other interpretations than the one featured here, see Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 24, vol. 13, p. 358, pp. 65−6, p. 414.

48. 'Ali ibn Khalaf ibn Battal (d.1054) was a *Maliki* scholar who wrote a commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

49. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari Bi-Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 13, pp. 354−5.

50. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, *Al-Minhaj Al-Qawim: Sharh Shihab Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami 'Ala Al-Muqaddima Al-Hadramiyya Fi Al-Fiqh Al-Shafi'I*, p. 224.

51. al-Qari al-Harawi, *Mirqat Al-Mafatih: Sharh Mishkat Al-Masabih*, 3, pp. 299−300.

52. al-Bayadi, *Isharat Al-Maram Min 'Ibarat Al-Imam*, p. 192.

53. Ibid., p. 193.

54. al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*, vol. 2, p. 36.

55. In fact, all of them are, with the exception of al-Sijzi (d.c.1014), who was described as a *Shafi'i* and whose book is on the subject of proving that the speech of God is made of letters and of a voice Abu Nasr 'Ubaydillah al-Sijzi, *Risalat Al-Sijzi Ila Ahl Zabid Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ankara Al-Harf Wa Al-Sawt* (Riyadh: Dar al-Rayah, 1994).

56. For more information on Abu Ya'la see *EI ²* vol. 3, p. 765 and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46, p. 135, n.235.

57. Ibid.

58. Abu al-Husayn Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ibn Abi Ya'la, *Tabaqat Al-Hanabila*, 2 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 211−12.

59. Abu Ya'la Muhammad ibn al-Husayn Ibn al-Farra, *Ibtal Al-Ta'wilat Li-Akhbar Al-Sifat* (Koweit: Dar ilaf al-dawliya li-al-nashr wa l-tawzi', 1989).

60. Abu al-Hasan Ibn al-Athir, 'Ali ibn Muhammad, *Al-Kamil Fi Al-Tarikh* 13 vols (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1965), vol. 10, p. 52.

61. For more biographical information on Ibn al-Zaghuni see Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46, pp. 136–7, n.236.

62. Ibid., p. 137, n.236.

63. 'Ali ibn 'Ubaydillah Ibn al-Zaghuni, *Kitab Al-Idah Fi Usul Al-Din*, Tahqiq Al-Turath, 2 (Riyadh: Markaz al-malik Faysal li-all-buhuth wa-al-dirasat al-islamiyya, 2003).

64. *Kitab Al-Idah Fi Usul Al-Din* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 2004).

65. The fact that Swartz states that there were no remaining copies of *Ibtal at-ta'wilat* and of *al-Idah* by Ibn al-Zaghuni made me believe that the anthropomorphists had encountered such a strong resistance that even getting hold of their actual works proved difficult. Then, during the course of the research, and thanks to the help of an anonymous Saudi source, without whom I would have no knowledge of these books, it appeared that in Saudi Arabia, a much longer list of books from that period could be gathered. However, these books do not seem to have been used and quoted as often as other works since the time they were written and they have recently been re-published. The fact that these books are now available after not being accessible is a sign of the growing interest in the current debate. Here, these books are studied to give us a flavour of past debates. However, the mere fact that they have been made available to us today is also a sign of the momentum that Wahhabism is gaining, in that it is unearthing controversial texts to legitimise its creed.

66. Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatawa*, 37 vols (Jedda: Maktaba ibn Taymiyya, 1979) *Kitab Minhaj Al-Sunna Al-Nabawiyya Fi Naqd Kalam Al-Shi'a Wa Al-Qadariyya Wa Bi Hamishihi Bayan Muwaqafa Sarih Al-Ma'Qul Li-Sahih Al-Manqul*, 4 vols in 2 vols (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1973).

67. *Minhaj Al-Sunnah Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra: Majmu'a Fatawa*, 5 vols (Baghdad: Maktaba al-Muthanna, 1972).

68. *Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra: Majmu'a Fatawa*; *Bayan Talbis Al-Jahmiyya Fi Ta'sis Bida'Ihim Al-Kalamiyya, Aw Naqd Ta'sis Al-Jahmiyya*, 2 vols (Riyadh: Dar al-Qasim, 2000).

69. *Bayan Talbis*; Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Uthman al-Dhahabi, 'Ithbat Al-Yad Li-Allah Subhanahu Sifat Min Sifatihi', in *Majmu' Fihi Thalath Rasa'il* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1998).

70. 'Ithbat Al-Yad Li-Allah Subhanahu Sifat Min Sifatihi'.
71. For more biographical information on al-Dhahabi see *EI* ² vol. 2, p. 214.
72. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46.
73. *Dafʿ Shubah*.
74. Swartz, who translated *Kitab Akhbar al-Sifat*, thinks that it is is either an expansion of his Dafʿ, as it is much longer, or it is the book which inspired the Dafʿ which would then be the summary of Kitab Akhbar as-Sifat. The absence of date on the manuscript that he found made it difficult for him to ascertain which book came first.
75. For more biographical information on Ibn Hamid one can consult Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46, p. 94, n.72 and p. 135, n.234.
76. Ibn al-Farra, *Ibtal Al-Taʾwilat Li-Akhbar Al-Sifat*, vol. 1, pp. 43–44.
77. al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*, vol. 1, pp. 176–7.
78. Translation by Merlin Swartz. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46, pp. 127; for the Arabic see p. 20.
79. Ibid., p. 124.; for the Arabic see pp. 19–20.
80. al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*, vol. 1, pp. 176–7.
81. Translation by Merlin Swartz. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Akhbar as-Sifat*, 46, p. 18 of the Arabic text.
82. Ibn al-Farra, *Ibtal Al-Taʾwilat Li-Akhbar Al-Sifat*, vol. 1, p. 115.
83. al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim Bi-Sharh Al-Imam Muhyi Al-Din Yahya Ibn Sharaf Al-Musamma Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahih Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj.*, vol. 5, pp. 26–7.
84. Ibn al-Zaghuni, *Kitab Al-Idah Fi Usul Al-Din* p. 211.
85. Ibid., p. 213–29.
86. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmuʿa Fatawa*, vol. 6, p. 394.
87. 'Al-Fatawa Al-Hamawiyya Al-Kubra', in *Nafaʾis*, ed. Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi (Cairo: Matbaʿa al-sunna al-Muhammadiyya, 1955), pp. 88–9.
88. Muwaffaq al-Din ʿAbd Allah ibn Ahmad Ibn Qudama, *Censure of Speculative Theology: An Edition and Translation of Ibn Qudama's 'Tahrim an-Nazar Fi Kutub Ahl Alkalem', with Introduction and Notes; a Contribution to the Study of Islamic Religious History*, trans. George Makdisi, Gibb Memorial Series, New Series No. 23 (London: Luzac, 1962), p. 7.
89. Translation by Richard McCarthy. al-Ashʿari, *Kitab Al-Lumaʿ*, vol. 1, pp. 120–1; ibid., vol. 1, pp. 132–4.; for the Arabic see vol. 2 pp. 87–8.
90. Ibid.; for the Arabic see vol. 2, pp. 96–7.
91. However, Ibn Baz will say he had never heard of this division between *Salaf* and *Khalaf* from anyone apart from al-Sabuni (see paragraph on Ibn Baz in the next section).
92. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmuʿa Fatawa*, vol. 4, p. 156.
93. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 157.

94. Ibid.
95. *Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra: Majmu'a Fatawa*, vol. 5, p. 3.
96. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 4.
97. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 5.
98. Ibid.
99. *Majmu'a Fatawa*, vol. 4, p. 152.
100. *Bayan Talbis*, vol. 1, p. 101.
101. *Minhaj Al-Sunnah*, vol. 1, p. 210.
102. *Bayan Talbis*, vol. 1, pp. 433–4.
103. al-Dhahabi, 'Ithbat Al-Yad Li-Allah Subhanahu Sifat Min Sifatihi,' p. 42.

Chapter 3   Wahhabism: A Historical Overview

1. Nabil Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam: Autorité Religieuse Et Pouvoir Politique En Arabie Saoudite, Xviiie-Xxie Siècle (Proche Orient)* (Paris Presses Universitaires de France, 2015). p. 76
2. John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Coulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), p. 59. See also 'Muhammad Hayya Al-Sindi and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madina', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 1 (1975).
3. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, 'Fatawa Wa Masa'il', in *Mu'allafat Al-Shaykh Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab* (Riyad: al-Markaz al-Islami li al-Taba'at wa al-Nashr, 2010), vol. 4, pp. 42–3.
4. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatawa*, vol. 1, p. 219 or vol. 2, p. 275.
5. Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Kashf Al-Shubuhat Wa-Al-Risalah Al-Mufida* (Riyadh: Ri'asa idara al-buhuth al-'ilmiyya wa al-ifta, 1988).
6. Ibid.
7. The fact that the author has relied exclusively on Wahhabi sources and funding to write it has been criticised in the past. For a compilation of these critics, see Zubair Qamar, 'Critical Book Review: Wahhabi Islam (by Natana De Long-Bas)', https://zubairqamar.com/2014/03/08/critical-book-review-wahhabi-islam-by-natana-delong-bas/ and Stephen Schwartz, 'Natana Delong-Bas: American Professor, Wahhabi Apologist' (2007), http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/01/natana_delongbas_american_prof.html. The book, however, does provide a rare analysis in English of some of his writings and tries to give an insight to the founder's psychology.
8. Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 18.

9. Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Najdi al-Hanbali Ibn Humayd, *Al-Suhub Al-Wabila 'Ala Dara'ih Al-Hanabila*, 1 ed. (Maktaba al-Imam Ahmad, 1989), p. 275. The notice also relates that his own brother, Sulayman, wrote a book against him and that Muhammad tried to have him killed by sending an insane person near him with a sword (p. 275, notice 415). Although this note gives some elements about how the father felt about the son (an element which was queried by some authors, such as Bilal Ahmad Kutty, 'Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab and His Reform Movement', *Hamdard Islamicus* 20, no. Ap-Je 1997 (1997): p. 49, n.20, it was not explored fully by Western researchers until the article that Commins dedicated to the author and his anti-Wahhabi leanings. David Dean Commins, 'Traditional Anti-Wahhabi Hanbalism in Nineteenth Century Arabia', in *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration*, ed. Itzchak Weismann and Fruma Zachs, Library of Ottoman Studies, 8 (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005): the article describes the role of *tabaqat* (biographical dictionaries) in 'asserting the legitimacy of one's own tradition and authority' and studies Ibn Humayd's anti-Wahhabi passages in the dictionary.

10. U.I.A. Ibn Bishr, *Unwan Al-Majd Fi Tarikh Al-Najd*, 4th ed. (Riyadh: Darat al-Malik Abd al Aziz, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 24–5.

11. See Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam*, p. 82 and Michael Crawford, Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab, ed. Patricia Crone, The Makers of the Muslim World (London: Oneworld, 2014), p. 36.

12. *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab,* p. 40 and Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam,* p. 83.

13. Madawi al-Rasheed has authored several studies on the history of Saudi Arabia, the narrative behind the construction of the political Saudi entity, but also on the various dissident voices that have been emerging from the Kingdom. For example, Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, Cambridge Middle East Studies, 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). She is herself the granddaughter of the last of the Rashidi princes who lost out to the al-Saud 'Shammar', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009). She is also a prominent critic of the Saudi regime, to the point of being considered to have encouraged a March 2012 uprising against it. It has also been reported that people in Saudi Arabia have been arrested for owning some of her writings. Denver University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 'Saudi Arabia & the Challenges of the Arab Uprisings: Madawi Al-Rasheed' (2017). Her work provides a counter-narrative to that offered by the Saudi regime.

14. Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 22–3.

15. Ibid., p. 20.

16. Ibid.
17. This idea is put forward by al-Rasheed in an interview given to Jihan El Tahri in London in April 2003. However, an article by al-Fahad makes the case to show that fatwas to legitimize military action had been used in the past by Saudi leaders. Abdulaziz H. al-Fahad, 'Commentary – from Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism', *New York University law review* 79, no. 2 (2004).
18. As admitted publicly by Frank Jungers, ARAMCO President between 1973 and 1977 and Mike Ameen, ARAMCO Vice-President between 1972–1975, in the PBS document 'The House of Saud', a transcript of which is available here: Jihan El-Tahri, 'House of Saud Transcript', http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/etc/script.html.
19. Wahhabi historians themselves acknowledge the massacres. However, they say that these took place 'after all peaceful means to spread the message had been used and only after they had encountered attacks (i.e., as self-defence).'
20. George Rentz was an American academic who helped design the literature available to the ARAMCO workers in Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s, ARAMCO being the American company set up in the thirties to extract Saudi oil.
21. George Snavely Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform in Saudi Arabia: Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab (1703/04–1792) and the Beginning of the Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publisher, 2004).
22. Madawi al-Rasheed, review of The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia, *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 1 (2006).
23. Ibid.
24. Esther Peskes, *Muhammad B. 'Abdalwahhab (1703–92) Im Widerstreit: Untersuchungen Zur Rekonstruktion Der Frühgeschichte Der Wahhabiya*, Beiruter Texte Und Studien (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), p. 368.
25. D.G. Hogarth, 'Wahabism and British Interests', *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1925): p. 79, W.F. Smalley, 'The Wahhabis and Ibn Saud', *The Moslem World* 22, no. 3 (1932): pp. 229–30, M.A. Khan, 'A Diplomat's Report on Wahhabism', *Islamic studies* 7 (1968): p. 64, Voll, 'Muhammad Hayya Al-Sindi and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madina', p. 32, Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 199, M.S. Zaharaddin, 'Wahhabism and Its Influence Outside Arabia', *Islamic quarterly* 23 (1979): pp. 146–9, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, 'Wahhabis, Unbelievers and the Problems of Exclusivism'

Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies 16, no. 2 (1989): p. 123, 'Modern Muslim Interpretations of Shirk', *Religion Ap 1990* 20, no. April 1990 (1990): p. 143, Sheikh M. Safiullah, 'Wahhabism: A Conceptual Relationship between Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab and Taqiyy Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya', *Hamdard Islamicus* 10, no. Spring 1987 (1987): pp. 72–3 to name but a few.

26. Peskes, *Muhammad B. 'Abdalwahhab (1703–92) Im Widerstreit: Untersuchungen Zur Rekonstruktion Der Frühgeschichte Der Wahhabiya*, p. 375.

27. An example is what is mentioned in George Snavely Rentz, 'Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia', in *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics*, ed. Derek Hopwood, Studies on Modern Asia and Africa, No. 8 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 55.

28. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*: this is an example of an academic work which not only exclusively uses these two books, but finds a way to dismiss the few other sources because their writers were hostile to Wahhabism. The author dedicates her first chapter to the reconstruction of Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab's life through four types of sources: the chronicles by Ibn Bishr and Ibn Ghannam, polemical works written by his opponents, accounts written by Western travellers and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own written works. However, she dismisses the last three as not being as useful as the two chronicles, for the polemical works 'have been largely discarded in the reconstruction of the biography of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab' (p. 16), for the Western travellers were not contemporaries ('they are not used to reconstruct the biography of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab or his immediate context', p. 16), and because Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab 'did not write an autobiography' (p. 16). Although she does mention, among the flaws of the sources she used, that 'both chroniclers tended to be supportive of the Wahhabi movement', there is no mention of Peskes' work in hers.

29. Talip Kücükcan, 'Some Reflections on the Wahhabiyah and the Sanusiyah Movements', *Hamdard Islamicus* 18 (1995): p. 69, Bilal Ahmad Kutty, 'Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab and His Reform Movement', ibid., 20, no. Ap-Je 1997 (1997): p. 43 and 'Religious and Political Origins of Saudi Arabia', *Hamdard Islamicus* 24, no. 2 (2001): pp. 51–2, A.M. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 70–6, Samira Haj, 'Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab' *Muslim World* 92, no. 3–4 Fall 2002 (2002), p. 338. Almost ten years after Peskes's thesis, Samira Haj wrote in the first sentence of her article: 'Notably absent in Western scholarship is a serious study of the eighteenth century Muslim reformist, Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Wahhab', the Western scholarship referred to here being two works by H.A.R. Gibb,

Modern Trends in Islam, The Haskell Lectures in Comparative Religion Delivered at the University of Chicago in 1945 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947) and *Modern Islam; the Search for Cultural Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962), written some half a century ago and not actually dedicated to the study of Wahhabism. Published the same year however, Traboulsi's article starts as follows 'The early history of the Wahhabi movement has received considerable attention in modern scholarship' (p. 374).

30. Samir Faruq Traboulsi, 'An Early Refutation of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab's Reformist View, *Welt des Islams* 42, no. 3 (2002): p. 374.

31. David Dean Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (I.B.Tauris, 2006).

32. Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab*.

33. Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam*.

34. Hamadi Redissi and Asma Nouira, *Al-Radd 'Ala L-Wahhabiyya Fi Al-Qarn Al-Tasi' 'Ashar* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 2008), p. 46. Redissi and Nouira also state that they find it difficult to retrace the exact conditions of the Arabian peninsula before the Wahhabi call: ibid., p. 29.

35. Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam*, p. 77.

36. Khalid S. al-Dakhil, 'Social Origins of the Wahhabi Movement' (Book; Archival Material, University of California, 1998).

37. Jerzy Zdanowski, 'On Reconstructing the History of the Wahhabia Arabia', *Hemispheres*, no. 10 (1995).

38. al-Dakhil, 'Social Origins of the Wahhabi Movement', p. 71.

39. Zdanowski, 'On Reconstructing the History of the Wahhabia Arabia', p. 125.

40. Peskes, *Muhammad B. 'Abdalwahhab (1703–92) Im Widerstreit: Untersuchungen Zur Rekonstruktion Der Frühgeschichte Der Wahhabiya*, p. 374 and p. 76 and Michael A Cook, 'On the Origins of Wahhabism', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2, no. 2 (1992): p. 202.

41. 'On the Origins of Wahhabism', p. 202.

42. Cook mentions that he found it in Ibn Ghannam Rawdat al-Afkar, Bombay, 1337 (AH), i, p. 189.12. I did find this edition but I found the letter in two different editions Husayn Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh Najd, Harrarahu Wa Haqqaqahu Nasir Al-Din Al-Asad* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Madani, 1961), pp. 341–2 and *Tarikh Najd, Harrarahu Wa Haqqaqahu Nasir Al-Din Al-Asad*, 2nd ed. (Beirut Dar al-Shuruq, 1985), pp. 309–10. It has also been included in the collection of letters by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Mu'allafat Al-Shaykh Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab* 12 vols (Riyad: Jami'a al-Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud al-islamiyya, 1981), vol. 5, pp. 186–7.

43. Mouline, *Les Clercs De L'islam*, p. 71.
44. Pascal Ménoret, *L'énigme Saoudienne: Les Saoudiens Et Le Monde, 1744–2003*, Cahiers Libres (Paris: Découverte, 2003), pp. 57–78.
45. As can be seen in the release by the website salafimanhaj.com, which edited a chapter of the book Jalal Abualrub, *Biography and Mission of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab*, ed. Alaa Mencke (Orlando, Florida: Madinah Publishers, 2003), pp. 677–81. entitled: 'who first used the term Wahhabi?' Found in http://www.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj_TermWahhabi (accessed 28 March 2008).
46. Redissi and Nouira, *Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Wahhabiyya*, pp. 27–8. They prove that the refutations against the movement started around 1740, i.e., well before the Turks, the travelers to the region, and the diplomats. The book is the latest research published in Arabic that we are aware of and which deals with Wahhabism. The two researchers have unearthed and edited manuscripts of letters written by Moroccan and Tunisian scholars against the Wahhabis in the nineteenth century. Before the part dealing with the letters themselves, the two researchers wrote a long explanation of the historical context of Wahhabism, taking into account European sources as well as Arabic ones, which makes it a thorough work on Wahhabism.
47. Sulaiman Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Al-Sawa'iq Al-Ilahiyya Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Wahhabiya Wa-Yalihi Risala Fi Hukm Al-Tawassul Bi-Al-Anbiya Wa-Al-Awliya Li-Muhammad Hasanayn Makhluf Al-'Adawi Wa-Yalihima Risalatayn: Al-Ula Al-Nuqul Al-Shar'Iyya Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Wahhabiyya Jam' Mustafa Ibn Ahmad Ibn Hasan Al-Shatti Al-Hanbali; Al-Thaniya Fi Tayid Madhhab Sadatina Al-Sufiyya Wa-Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Mu'Taridin 'Alayhim Li-Al-Mu'allif; Sahhaha Al-Jami' Al-Shaykh 'Id Al-Wasif Muhammad* (Cairo: Maktaba al-tahdhib, 1900). Now available in English *The Divine Lightning*, trans. Al-Hajj Abu Ja'far Al-Hanbali, Intermediate Cult Series (Spire Publishing 2011).
48. The story of this brother is also the object of attempts by some Salafists to rewrite history. It is now suggested that Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab changed his mind before dying, when absolutely nothing confirms or even remotely suggests that he might have, as has been shown in *Al-Khilaf Bayna Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab Wa Akhihi Sulayman* (Unpublished Article, 2007). This article is the only article that has been written, whether in Arabic or another language, as far as I am aware, to provide a serious study of the arguments of Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab against his brother. I am thankful to Saud for having brought the article to my attention. The researcher has shown a great command of his sources and analyses and it would greatly serve the Muslim community if it were published.

49. Redissi and Nouira, *Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Wahhabiyya*, pp. 28–9.

50. Imam here is to refer to a Sa'ud, i.e., to the political leader. *Ulama* is used by the Wahhabis to refer to a Wahhabi scholar.

51. Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-Wahhabiyyun Wa Al-Hijaz* (Cairo: Dar al-Nada, 2000).

52. He is referring to the person against whom he writes. The phrase 'as the writer tends to put it' is directed at the rest of the sentence, i.e., his opponent tends to suggest that the Wahhabiyya are 'new in rejecting such innovations', it is not a phrase qualifying the name 'Wahhabiyya'. Ibn Baz uses the term 'Wahhabiyya' here without condemnation.

53. Translation is anonymous, the pamphlet, in Arabic and in English, is distributed for free in worship places and is also available online: 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Baz, 'Indispensable Implication of Sunna and Caution against Innovation', Presidency of Islamic Research, http://www.qss.org/articles/milad.html.

54. Rentz, 'Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia', p. 54.

55. Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2002). Algar is a known sympathiser of Khomeini and a strong critic of the Saudi regime. His essay quoted above is highly critical, but his comment on the naming of the movement is worth noting.

56. This is the name currently used by another organisation claiming to follow the footsteps of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and that is the so-called Islamic State, in its publications such as Dabiq.

57. Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, pp. 1–2. Redissi and Nouira come to the same conclusion that because their preferred name is derogatory to others, using the term 'Wahhabis' was more practical.

58. David Dean Commins, 'From Wahhabi to Salafi', in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

59. Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Le Califat Dans La Doctrine De Rasid Rida: Traduction Annotée De Al-Hilafa Aw Al-Imama Al-'Uzma (Le Califat, Ou L'imama Suprême)*, trans. Henri Laoust, Mémoires De L'institut Francais De Damas T. 6. (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1986), p. 93. Laoust also mentions that Ibn Taymiyya did use the term *salafi* but that the expression 'Muhammadi' was more frequent in his works.

60. King 'Abd al-Aziz, on the day of the celebration of Eid 1946 marking the climax of the hajj, addressed those present with a speech entitled 'My belief is *salafiyya*' (*aqidat al-salafiyya*) in which he says that he is a *salafi* man (p. 147) and that people call him and his people '*Wahhabis*' when truly they are *Salafiyyun* (p. 148): *Mukhtarat Min Al-Khutab Al-Malakiyya*, 2 vols,

Maktaba Al-Dara Al-Miawiyya (Riyadh: Darat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 146–9.

61. Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah Sakakir, *Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: Hayatuhu, Atharuhu, Da'Watuhu Al-Salafiya 1115–1206h, 1703–1792m* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Amma, 1999).Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah Sakakir, *Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: Hayatuhu, Atharuhu, Da'Watuhu Al-Salafiya 1115–1206h, 1703–1792m* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Amma, 1999).

62. 'Abd al-Halim al-Jundi, *Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab Aw Intisar Al-Manhaj Al-Salafi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1986).

63. Ahmad ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Husayyin, *Da'Wa Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab, Salafiyya La Wahhabiya* (Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-kutub, 1999). Ahmad ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Husayyin, *Da'Wa Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab, Salafiyya La Wahhabiya* (Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-kutub, 1999).

64. Commins, 'From Wahhabi to Salafi'.

65. Uwaidah Metaireek al-Juhany, 'The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis: A Study of Social, Political and Religious Conditions in Najd During Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhabi Reform Movement' (Book; Archival Material, University of Washington, 1983).

66. *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social, Political, and Religious Conditions During the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2002).

67. 'The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis: A Study of Social, Political and Religious Conditions in Najd During Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhabi Reform Movement', p. 7.

68. *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement*, p. 164.

69. Other analysts provide more refined typologies, but this one presents the advantage of being broad enough for the purpose of this study and it gives three easily identifiable categories. For a detailed overview of the current debates within the Salafist milieu, notably in Saudi Arabia, see al-Rasheed, *Contesting*. For a rationale-based typology of Islamic Militancy, see Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism', in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London Hurst & Co., 2009). There is a working eight-category typology here Jarret M Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 26–41.

70. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): p. 208.

71. However, these two clerics are still sparking debates about their alignments: due to their past, they are seen by some as 'Islamist wolves in disguise', but owing to some of their recent stands on societal issues, they

are described by some as having sincerely changed and evolved. For example al-'Awda declared last year that homosexuals should not be punished in Islam MEE Staff, 'Senior Saudi Cleric: Homosexuality Should Not Be Punished', *Middle East Eye*, 3 May 2016, but at the same time he has recently been added to the list of banned 'hate preachers' by Denmark Teis Jensen, 'Denmark Bans Six "Hate Preachers" from Entering the Country', *Reuters*, 2 May 2017.

72. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, 'Tafsir Ayat Min Al-Qur'an Al-Karim', in *Mu'allafat Al-Shaykh Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab* (Riyad: al-Markaz al-Islami li al-Taba'at wa al-Nashr, 2010), vol. 7, p. 228 and 'Masa'il Lakhkhasaha Al-Shaykh Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab', in *Mu'allafat Al-Shaykh Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab* (Riyadh: al-Markaz al-Islami li al-Taba'at wa al-Nashr, 2010), vol. 13, p. 73.

73. Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad Ibn Qasim, *Al-Durar Al-Saniyya Fi Al-Ajwiba Al-Najdiyya* (Riyad1996), vol. 1, p. 226.

74. Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Fath Al-Majid Li-Sharh Kitab Al-Tawhid*, 1, tab'ah jadidah muqaranah bi-al-taba'at al-sabiqah. ed. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1999), p. 446.

Chapter 4   Modern Approaches Since the Rise of Wahhabism

1. 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-Darimi, 'Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Jahmiyya', in *'Aqa'id Al-Salaf*, ed. 'Ali Sami Nashshar and Ammar Talibi (Alexandria: Munsha'at al-Ma'arif, 1971) and 'Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Marisi Al-'Unayd,' in *'Aqa'id Al-Salaf*, ed. 'Ali Sami Nashshar and Ammar Talibi (Alexandria: Munsha'at al-Ma'arif, 1971).

2. http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/al_kawthari.htm.

3. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Daf' Shubah*.

4. Muhammad Zahid ibn al-Hasan al-Kawthari, *Maqalat Al-Kawthari* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-azhariyya li-al-turath, 1994), p. 383.

5. All of these issues (and more) are mentioned in al-Darimi's book al-Darimi, 'Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Jahmiyya'.

6. al-Kawthari, *Maqalat Al-Kawthari*, pp. 391–8.

7. Not to be confused with 'Abdullah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman (d.255 AH/869 CE), who was a *hadith* scholar.

8. al-Kawthari, *Maqalat Al-Kawthari*, p. 400.

9. al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Ithaf Al-Sadat*.

10. For more biographical information on al-Murtada al-Zabidi, see *EI* [2], vol. 7, p. 445.

11. Mahmud Muhammad Khattab al-Subki al-Azhari, *Al-Manhal Al-'Adhb Al-Mawrud Sharh Sunan Al-Imam Abi Dawud* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Istiqama, 1932).

12. *Ithaf Al-Ka'inat Bi-Bayan Madhhab Al-Salaf Wa Al-Khalaf Fi Al-Mutashabihat: Wa Radd Shibh Al-Malhada Wa Al-Majsama Wa Ma Ya'Taqiduna Min Al-Muftariyat* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Istiqama, 1932).

13. Muhammad 'Abd al-'Azim al-Zurqani, *Manahil Al-'Irfan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran*, 2 vols (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-kutub al-'arabiyya, 1943).

14. Muhammad ibn Salama al-'Azzami al-Shafi'i al-Quda'i, *Al-Barahin Al-Sati'a Fi Radd Ba'D Al-Bida' Al-Sha'i'a Wa Barahin Al-Kitab Wa Al-Sunna Al-Natiqa 'Ala Wuqu' Al-Talaqat Al-Majmu'A* (Matba'a al-Sa'ada, 1960).

15. Abu Hamid Ibn Marzuq, *Bara'at Al-Ash'Ariyyin Min 'Aqa'id Al-Mukhalifin*, 2 v. in 1 vols (Damascus: Matba'a al-'ilm, 1968).

16. Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn 'Ashur, *Tafsir Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir* (Tunis: Dar al-tunisiyya li-al-Nashr, 1984).

17. 'Abd al-Qadir 'Isa Diyab, *Al-Mizan Al-'Adil Li-Tamyiz Al-Haqq Min Al-Batil* (Damascus: Dar al-Taqwa, 2004).

18. 'Abd Allah al-Harari al-Habashi, *Al-Sharh Al-Qawim Fi Hal Alfaz Al-Sirat Al-Mustaqim* (Beirut: Dar al-Mashari', 2004) p. 197.

19. Mustafa Kabha and Haggai Erlich, 'Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiyya: Interpretations of Islam', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no 4 (2006).

20. al-Buti, *Al-Salafiyya: Marhala Zamaniyya Mubaraka La-Madhhab Islami*.

21. al-Subki al-Azhari, *Al-Manhal Al-'Adhb Al-Mawrud Sharh Sunan Al-Imam Abi Dawud*, vol. 5, p. 34.

22. Translation by Abu Adam al-Narujiy http://fiqhlessons.blogspot.com/2004/07/fatwa-of-scholars-of-azhar-on-one-who.html.

23. al-Subki al-Azhari, *Ithaf Al-Ka'inat Bi-Bayan Madhhab Al-Salaf Wa Al-Khalaf Fi Al-Mutashabihat: Wa Radd Shibh Al-Malhada Wa Al-Majsama Wa Ma Ya'Taqiduna Min Al-Muftariyat*, pp. 5–6. Translation by Abu Adam al-Narujiy who posted a commented translation of this fatwa on his blog on hanafi fiqh: *'Fatwa* of the Scholars of Azhar on the One Who Believes That Allah Settles in Created Things or That He Has a Direction', http://fiqhlessons.blogspot.com/2004/07/fatwa-of-scholars-of-azhar-on-one-who.html.

24. Yusuf al-Dujwi, 'Tafsir Surat Al-a'La', *Majalla al-Azhar* 9 (1938): p. 17.

25. Ibid.

26. al-Zurqani, *Manahil Al-'Irfan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran*, vol. 2, pp. 186–7.

27. al-Quda'i, *Al-Barahin Al-Sati'a Fi Radd Ba'D Al-Bida' Al-Sha'i'a Wa Barahin Al-Kitab Wa Al-Sunna Al-Natiqa 'Ala Wuqu' Al-Talaqat Al-Majmu'A*, vol. 1, pp. 240–1.

28. Ibrahim al-Dasuqi, 'Al-Rahman 'Ala Al-'Arsh Istawa', *Majalla al-Azhar* (1993–4).
29. Ibid.
30. Diyab, *Al-Mizan Al-'Adil Li-Tamyiz Al-Haqq Min Al-Batil*, p. 5.
31. Ibid., p. 129.
32. Ibn Marzuq, *Bara'at Al-Ash'Ariyyin Min 'Aqa'id Al-Mukhalifin*, vol. 1, p. 10.
33. Ibn 'Ashur, *Tafsir Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir* vol. 9, p. 33.
34. Kabha and Erlich, 'Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiyya: Interpretations of Islam'.
35. al-Harari al-Habashi, *Al-Sharh Al-Qawim Fi Hal Alfaz Al-Sirat Al-Mustaqim*, pp. 197–9.
36. Ibid., p. 201.
37. al-Buti, *Al-Salafiyya: Marhala Zamaniyya Mubaraka La-Madhhab Islami*,, pp. 132–3.
38. Ibid., pp. 133–4.
39. For more details on that one can read the chapter 'Re-enchanting politics: Sahwis from contestation to co-optation' al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, pp. 52–101.
40. Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan, *Al-Muntaqa Min Fatawa Fadilat Al-Shaykh Al-Duktur Salih Ibn Fawzan Ibn 'Abd Allah Al-Fawzan*, 3 vols (Cairo: Dar al-Imam Ahmad, 2006).
41. A copy can be retrieved here http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?t=313365.
42. Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, *I'Lam Al-Mu'Asirin Bi-Fatawa Ibn Al-'Uthaymin: Fatawa Mu'Asira* (Cairo: Muassasa al-Mukhtar, 2006).
43. http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/.
44. http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?t=313365; link no longer working.
45. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Baz, *Tanbihat Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ta'awwala Al-Sifat* (al-Riyad: al-Ri'asa al-'amma li-al-idarat al-buhuth al-'ilmiyya, 1984), p. 18.
46. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatawa*, vol. 4, p. 156.
47. Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, *The Muslim's Belief*, trans. Maneh Hammad al-Johani (Riyadh: World Assembly of Muslim Youth).
48. Id.
49. Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan, 'Tanbihat 'Ala Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', in *Tanbihat Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ta'awwala Al-Sifat*, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Baz (Riyadh: al-Ri'asa al-'amma li-al-idarat al-buhuth al-'ilmiyya, 1984), p. 62.
50. Ibid., p. 68.

51. Although he qualifies his statement by adding that he only excludes them as long as this issue is concerned, but not in relation to other issues where they do not contradict, according to him, Sunni principles. This argument equates to saying that some people can belong 'partly' to Ahl al-Sunna, which seems to go against his position that both the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf* were correct, even though they had slightly different approaches to the interpretation of ambiguous verses.

52. al-Fawzan, 'Tanbihat 'Ala Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', pp. 72–3.

53. Ibid., pp. 73–4.

54. Ibid., p. 78.

55. Safar al-Hawali, 'Al-Hadi 'Ashar: Al-Ta'wil', Alhawali.com, http://bit.ly/HawaliTawil.

56. Ibid.

57. 'Al-Fatawa Wa Al-Istisharat', Islamtoday.net http://bit.ly/AwdaQuestions. This link gives access to all the questions dealing with this issue.

58. Dr Su'ud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz Al-'Arifi, 'Al-Salaf Wa at-Tafwid', IslamToday.net, http://bit.ly/AwdaTawil.

59. Here it appears that the author tries to make interpretation appear as a distortion, however it is unlikely to find a group claiming to be Muslim that would at the same time specifically say that a word of the Qur'an should be changed. The aim is to make those who appear to suggest *istawla* as a correct meaning of *istawa* in that verse (and *istawa* indeed carries the meaning of *istawla* in some contexts in Arabic) appear as if they are trying to change the words of the Quran, which is abhorrent to Muslims.

60. Ahmad ibn Muhammad Al-Khudayri, 'Madh-Hab Ahl Al-Sunna Fi Al-Sifat', http://bit.ly/AwdaSifat.

61. See, for example, Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Rawdat Al-Talibin* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), pp. 282–304.

62. 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar Al-Dumayji, 'Ithbat Sifat Al-Makan Lillah', IslamToday.net, http://bit.ly/AwdaMakan.

63. Abd al-Rahman Al-Barrak, 'Haqiqat Al-Tajsim 'Inda Al-Salafiyyeen', IslamToday.net, http://bit.ly/AwdaJism.

64. 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Abd al-Khaliq, 'Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ankara Tawhid Al-Asma Wa Al-Sifat', Tawhed.ws, http://bit.ly/TawhedSifat.

65. 'Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ankara Tawhid Al-Asma Wa Al-Sifat, Al-Fasl Al-Thani', Tawhed.ws, http://bit.ly/TawhedSifat2.

66. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is praised in various passages of the magazine. For example, it is said: 'And from the Arabian Peninsula, Imām Muhammad Ibn 'Abdil-Wahhāb (rahimahullāh) revived the *da'wah* of *tawhīd* and *walā*' and *barā*', calling firmly to the Sunnah of *Rasūlullāh* (*sallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) without compromise,' in 'Remaining and

Expanding', *Dabiq* 5 (2014), p. 26. Also: 'Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa', *Dabiq* 8 (2015), p. 46 and 'Al Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within', *Dabiq* 6 (2014), p. 11 and p. 19.

67. Aymenn Jawad, 'This Is Our Aqeeda and This Is Our Manhaj: Islam 101 According to the Islamic State', http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-is-our-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam#continued.

68. Abdullah Faisal, 'The Outrage in Paris: A Muslim's Perspective', http://bit.ly/FaisalNov15 [31:6, 31–33]. The *fatwa* he is referring to is available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFQ1n1eY_hg and has also been reused by quietists such as Shaykh Muqbil here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = Xhsus_BsAsw.

69. 'Let's Call a Spade a Spade', Authentictauheed.com, http://www.authentictauheed.com/2015/01/notes-audio-lets-call-spade-spade-part-1.html.

70. Ibid.

Chapter 5   A Vision of History Opposed to Sunni Islam

1. Although he used to exclude those who, according to him, had not had Islam explained properly, i.e., those to whom the Wahhabi call had not reached yet, would be, in his view, still Muslim, but would the gravity of their actions explained to them and then be asked not to repeat them.

2. According to Smalley, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab copied them all: 'The Wahhabis and Ibn Saud', p. 228. However, according to Safiullah, he copied only a few of the works of Ibn Taymiyya, and he mentions that these copies of Ibn Taymiyya's books with Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's handwriting can be found in the British Museum in London: Safiullah, 'Wahhabism: A Conceptual Relationship between Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab and Taqiyy Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya', p. 70. Safiuallah mentions that he found this information in V.E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyya's Ethics: The Social Factor* (California: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 190.

3. She deduces from the fact that Ibn Taymiyya is quoted only three times – out of 170 citations – in Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's book entitled *Kitab al-Tawhid* that: 'Ibn Taymiya was, at most, a negligible source of inspiration.' *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, p. 53. However, the number of explicit references made in the small pamphlet *Kitab al-Tawhid* might not be enough to arrive at this conclusion. After a review of *Kitab al-nikah* by Muhammad ibn ' Abd al-Wahhab, DeLong-Bas concludes that she has now 'definitively rejected "*taqlid*" to any scholar on the part of Ibn Abd al Wahhab' because Ibn Taymiyya is not mentioned once. Ibid., p. 109. This approach underestimates a phenomenon that

Cook pointed out in one of his works, which is that Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab might have taken all the sources he mentions in his works from one author, and that studying Ibn Taymiyya's works carefully could reveal that any person Muhammad Ibn abd al-Wahhab quoted who was prior to Ibn Taymiyya's time might be already quoted by Ibn Taymiyya, which would demonstrate that Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab took most of his references from him, which constitutes a more subtle interpretation than the one offered by Delong-Bas. Cook, 'On the Origins of Wahhabism', p. 198. This dimension (as well as the article in which Cook mentions this idea) is not referred to by DeLong-Bas.

4. Christine Noelle, 'The Anti-Wahhabi Reaction in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan', *Muslim World* 85, no. January-April (1995): p. 32.

5. Traboulsi, 'An Early Refutation of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab's Reformist Views', pp. 385–6.

6. Ahmad Dallal, 'The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): p. 350.

7. For more information one can consult Abrahamov, 1995 and 1996, in spite of some problems of translation and Swartz, 2002, can be consulted as a very interesting study of a Hanbali scholar who was a direct student of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal who wrote a book refuting anthropomorphism.

8. D.S. Margoliouth, 'Wahhabism', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings and John A. Selbie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), p. 660.

9. Redissi and Nouira, *Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Wahhabiyya*. One of the reasons for that could be because the study is centered on the refutations made by North African scholars to the letters received by them from the emissaries of the first Saudi rulership. Those letters, as far as we are aware, do not say anything specific on the Attributes of God but rather on other main themes developed in the Wahhabi rhetoric, i.e., alleged polytheism and the definition of worship of God. The insistence on this issue did not seem to be as central to Wahhabism as it is now (even though it is touched upon in the book called *Kitab al-Tawhid*).

10. Articles dealing with the shifting meaning of Sunnism (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-jama'a*) today, and the way Sunnism is being 'constructed' include A. Kevin Reinhart, 'On Sunni Sectarianism', in *Living Islamic History, Studies in Honour of Professor Carole Hillenbrand*, ed. Yasir Suleiman (Edinburh: Edinburh University Press, 2010). There are also books dealing with this issue. For example, Hamadi Redissi, *Le Pacte De Nadjd Ou Comment L'islam Sectaire Est Devenu L'islam*, La Couleur Des Idées (Paris: Seuil 2007) and Jean-Michel Vernochet, *Les Égarés: Le Wahhabisme Est-Il Un Contre Islam?* (Paris: Sigest, 2013).

11. See, for example, Gardet, *Théologie Musulmane*, 37; Norman Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy', in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London: I.B.Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000); MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory*, p. 186–215; or Abdul Hye, 'Asharism', in *A History of Muslim Philosophy. With Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, ed. Mian Mohammad Sharif (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), p. 243. The attempts by George Makdisi to minimise the impact of the *Ash'ari* school, notably in Baghdad and Damascus, in two articles ('Ash'Ari and the Ash'Arites in Islamic Religious History I', *Studia Islamica*, no. 17; 'Ash'Ari and the Ash'Arites in Islamic Religious History Ii', *Studia Islamica*, no. 18) have been seriously challenged by Makdisi's own student in the same year: 'Origins and Character of "Al-Madrassah"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 25, no. 1/3 (1962); and by Madelung in a 1971 article reprinted in 1985: Wilferd Madelung, 'The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks', in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, ed. Wilferd Madelung (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), n.3 p. 110.

12. Describing Ash'arism as a theological system based only on rational arguments is one way of dismissing it used by its opponents. However, al-Ash'ari's books on theology, such as *al-Luma'*, are replete with quotes of verses as illustrations for his arguments, thereby demonstrating that all the main rational arguments he uses are indeed rooted in the scripturesal-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*. This edition of *al-Luma'* also contains a treatise where al-Ash'ari develops and explains the merits of theological speculation (*kalam*), basing himself on the Qur'an.

13. Madelung shows that Maturidism was more restricted in place, and took more time to being established but was still considered part of Islamic orthodoxy Madelung, 'The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks'. Other articles explain that Maturidism must have started before Ash'arism due to the dates of birth of their respective founders (i.e., al-Ash'ari was born in 260 but starting to preach orthodox views at the age of 40, i.e., at the beginning of the fourth century, whereas Imam Maturidi, probably born in 853, would have started to preach at around the age of 40, or in any case before the end of the third century: A.K.M. Ayyub 'Ali, 'Maturidism', in *A History of Muslim Philosophy. With Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, ed. Mian Mohammad Sharif (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963)).

14. For Muslim scholars who define Sunnism in this way, one can refer for example to an introductory chapter of al-Sinan's book where quotes of

Muslim classical erudites such as al-Baghdadi (d.1037), al-Shirazi (d.1083), Ibn 'Asakir (d.1176) al-Subki (d.1370), al-Suyuti (d.1505), al-Murtada al-Zabidi (d.1791), among others, are given to this effect, together with references: Hamad al-Sinan and Fawzi al-'Injari, *Ahl Al-Sunna Al-Asha'Ira, Shihadatu 'Ulama'i Al-Umma* (2006), pp. 81–8.

15. See, for example, Gardet, *Théologie Musulmane*, 37; Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy'; MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory*, pp. 186–215; or Hye, 'Asharism', p. 243.

16. MacDonald mentions that Muslim scholars have found 13 such points of divergence, most of which they admitted were mere 'combats of words' MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory*, p. 193. One of their main point of difference about '*istithna*' in faith for example, is studied here: Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology*, Studies in the Humanities and Social Relations V. 6 (New York: Books for Libraries, 1980), pp. 194–203.

17. Arabic text: Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, 'Ma Hiyya 'Aqida Al-Muslimin Qabla Zuhur Al-Asha'Ira Wa Al-Maturidiyya?', Bouti.net, http://bit.ly/boutifatwa.

18. Mufti Ebrahim Desai, 'What Are the Differences in the Aqeedah of the Asharites and the Maturidiites?', Ask-Imam.com, http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=14342.

19. Literally, from *hashw*, 'farce', and hence derogative for 'prolix and useless discourse.' It is the name given to those who 'uncritically and even prompted by prejudice, recognize as genuine and interpret literally the crudely anthropomorphic traditions.' *EI²*, vol. 3, p. 269. It is commonly used by *Ash'ari* scholars as a synonym for 'the most extreme anthropomorphists'.

20. A theological trend which is sometimes described as having tried to introduce rational arguments into Islamic theological system. It is in the literature against that group that one can most easily pinpoint the differences between them and the Orthodox Sunnis; it can therefore be argued that they played an important part in defining orthodoxy. In addition to that, Imam al-Ash'ari was the student of one of their most prominent figures: al-Jubba'i, and his intimate knowledge of their theory helped him retaliate when he became the leader of the Sunnis in the theological scene. For more on their actual features and interpretations one can consult: *EI²*, vol. 7, pp. 783–93.

21. The name given to those who attribute a body to God, here 'anthropomorphists,' is used for *mujassima* as well as *mushabbiha* (literally: those who imply God resembles His creations).

22. Gibril Fouad Haddad, 'Al-Asha'Ira- the Ash'Aris', Sunnah.org, http://www.sunnah.org/aqida/alashaira9.htm.

23. Muhammad ibn 'Alawi al-Maliki al-Hasani, *Mafahim Yajibu an Tusahhaha* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-'alamiyya, 2002).

24. See in French: 'La Vérité Sur Les Ash'Arites', Islamophile.org; and in English: 'The Ash'ari School', Masud.co.uk, http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ashari.htm.

25. A sect which denied the distinct existence of all of God's Attributes. Their alleged leader, Jahm ibn Safwan, is presented as believing that Hellfire has an end, which is not the orthodox view. There is an account of their beliefs in: Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, p. 199.

26. al-Maliki al-Hasani. 'The Ash'ari School'. Available at: http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ashari.htm (accessed 23 July 2016).

27. Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy', p. 82.

28. Muhammad Amin ibn 'Umar Ibn 'Abidin, *Hashiyat Radd Al-Muhtar 'Ala Al-Durr Al-Mukhtar, Sharh Tanwir Al-Absar Fi Fiqh Madhhab Al-Imam Abi Hanifah Al-Nu'Man, Wa-Yalihi Takmilat Ibn 'Abidin, Li-Najl Al-Mu'allif*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992).

29. Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy', p. 78.

30. Ibid.

31. Salafists completely discard this heritage and do not allow for references to be taken from a whole array of scholars whom they deem misguided in terms of creed while the rest of the community considered them reliable on these).

32. al-Maliki al-Hasani. 'The Ash'ari School' Available at: http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ashari.htm (accessed 23 July 2016).

33. There are debates about whether a Muslim layman born in a country dominantly *Maliki*, for example, and who learned how to pray there according to *Maliki* principles, automatically qualifies or not to be called 'a *Maliki*'. Some argue that for a person to be called '*Maliki*', they would need to master the proofs given by Imam Malik before he gave such and such judgement. However, it appears that laymen are referred to in those terms (*Hanafis*, *Shafi'is*, *Malikis*, etc.) because the only way they know how to pray is derived from the dominant school of their environment, regardless of whether or not they know what prompted the Imam founder of the school to give such judgements. Therefore, this is why I allow myself to count laymen as belonging to a given school and all of them count as Sunnis. In any case, were we to consider that laymen should be taken out of the count, then the argument stills follows, as the vast majority of Sunni scholars will be either *Ash'aris* or *Maturidis* and following one of the four schools of law.

34. According to some other versions, he answered 'What I and my companions are upon' (i.e., 'those who are upon what I and my companions are upon'): Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, p. 14 and Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, 10 vols in 5 vols (Hims: Maktaba Dar al- Da'va, 1965), vol. 7, *hadith* 2643, p. 43, pp. 297–8 Al-Tirmidhi classifies this *hadith* as *mufassar gharib* which means that it needs further interpretation. In some other versions he would have answered *al-Sawad al-A'dham*, which means 'the majority'.

35. Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah, *Sunan* (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1972), vol. 2, *hadith* 3993, p. 1322 and also Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, vol. 5, *hadith* 4596.

36. al-Shahrastani, *Milal*, vol. 1, p. 11 and Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa-Bayan Al-Firqa Al-Najiyya Minhum*, pp. 4–5.

37. al-Shahrastani, *Milal*, vol. 1, p. 93. This is also noted by Gimaret who actually uses this as one among many arguments for his classifying of al-Shahrastani as an Ashari *Religions*, vol. 1, p. 53.

38. Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustashfa Min 'Ilm Al-Usul Wa Bi-Dhaylihi Fawatih Al-Rahamut Bi-Sharh Musallam Al-Thubut Fi Usul Al-Fiqh*, reprint of Cairo Edition 1904–1907 ed., 2 vols (Baghdad: Maktaba al-Muthanna, 1970), vol. 1, p. 175.

39. al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, vol. 21, p. 219. It appears to me that the whole passage shows clearly that al-Razi, far from rejecting the *hadith* altogether, accepts it, explains its meaning and shows that one should simply understand that the community will be divided in such a way that no new sect would appear (which one could understand as: new groups will always be a resurgence of different subdivisions which have previously existed, and there is this tendency indeed, in Islamic scholarship, to attempt to find roots to new groups in the teachings of other groups that had appeared in the past).

40. Mufti Ebrahim Desai, 'Why Does a Majority of Hanafis and Shafii Today Follow the Aqeedah of the Maturidi/Ashari Even Though Imam Shafii and Imam Abou Hanifa Followed the Aqeedah of the Salaf?', Ask-Imam.com, http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/view.php?q=14342. Last accessed in April 2009. Link no longer working.

41. al-Maliki al-Hasani. 'The Ash'ari School' Available at: http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ashari.htm (accessed 23 July 2016).

42. See above.

43. See above.

44. Literally 'those who defer judgement', as originally they were suspending their judgement about whether 'Uthman or 'Ali should have been the next

caliph. They were described, in Ash'ari polemical works, as people who believed that a Muslim would be forgiven of all his sins even though he died without repenting from them, and regardless of whether these sins were considered among the biggest or not, i.e., the same way that good deeds are not supposed to benefit the non-believer, sins would not harm the believer. But Madelung is of the view that 'Any description of the Murdjia as either laxists or as raising excessive hope for divine forgiveness, even though suggested by some early anti-Murdjiite polemics, is basically mistaken.' *EI* ^{2}, vol. 2, p. 365.

45. Literally 'those who hold the doctrine of compulsion', i.e., the idea that man does not really act and that only God does. This belief was combated by *Ash'ari* scholars who insisted men are not like feathers in the wind but rather that they have a choice which is under the will of God (notion of *kasb*). They are also sometimes called 'Mujbira', with the same meaning.

46. See Chapter 5, note 19.

47. See Chapter 5, note 21.

48. Also '*al-Rawafid*'. Literally: 'the deniers'. This term is used in polemical works to refer pejoratively to the Twelver Shi'as. For a detailed account of the history of the word and the movement it refers to one can read Kohlberg's notice in *EI* ^{2}, vol. 8, pp. 386–9.

49. One detailed account of his life can be found in Gimaret, *La Doctrine D'al-Ash'Ari*. Some aspects of his life (such as how he changed from Mu'tazilism to Sunnism) can also be found here; for example, Rosalind W. Gwynne, 'Al-Jubba'i, Al-Ash'Ari and the 3 Brothers: The Uses of Fiction', *Muslim World* 75 (1985) as well as in classical works by his followers such as Ibn 'Asakir, *Tabyin*.

50. There are two balanced articles on this issue: one by Ibn Hamid 'Ali at the end of his translation of *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbih* and entitled *Kitab al-Ibana: a case study*, in Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Attributes of God*, pp. 117–23 and also one by MacCarthy at the end of his translation of *Kitab al-Luma'* entitled *A note on the Ibana*:al-Ash'ari, *Kitab Al-Luma'*, vol. 2, pp. 231–2. Both authors express doubts regarding the true authorship of al-Ibana.

51. It is narrated that he renounced Mu'tazili teachers and went back to Sunnism in front of an audience, in a mosque; Ibn 'Asakir, *Tabyin*.

52. al-Fawzan, 'Tanbihat 'Ala Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', pp. 60–1.

53. Nuh Ha Mim Keller, 'Imam Ash'Ari Repudiating Ash'Arism', http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/masudq2.htm.

54. He is an American graduate of the Islamic University of Qarawiyyin in Morocco who translated Ibn al-Jawzi's *Daf' shubah al-tashbih* and al-Ghazali's *Iljam al-'awwami 'an 'ilm al-Kalam*: Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Attributes of God* and

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Return to Purity in Creed*, trans. ʻAbdullah Ibn Hamid ʻAli (Philadelphia: Lamppost Productions, 2008).

55. Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Attributes of God*, p. 123.

56. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmuʻa Fatawa*, vol. 5, p. 556.

57. Example: Abu ʻIyad al-Salafi, 'Abu Hasan Al-AshʻAriyy's Final Book 'Al-Ibaanah", Spubs.com, www.spubs.com. Article ID AQD060001.

58. For example, it has been narrated that upon the revelation of the following verse, the Prophet pointed to Abu Musa al-Ashʼari and said "They are that man's people: O you who believe! Whoever among you turns back from his Religion, know that in his stead Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward believers, stern toward disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. Such is the grace of Allah which He gives to whom He will. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing." (5:54). More narrations can be found here: Gibril Fouad Haddad, 'The Prophetic Narrations in Praise of the Ashʼaris', http://www.sunnah.org/aqida/alashaira7.htm.

59. Safar al-Hawali, 'Manhaj Al-Ashaʻira Fi Al-ʻAqida', Alhawali.com, http://bit.ly/HawaliManhaj.

60. For severe refutations against Safar al-Hawaali by the traditional Wahhabis, see (among other articles) 'An Exposition of the Deviation of Safar Al-Hawali in His "True and Bogus Promise"', www.spubs.com; 'Safar Al-Hawaali's Plot and Deception Uncovered: The Accusation of Irjaa', www.spubs.com; 'Refutation of Safar Al-Hawali's Insults, Revilements and Slanders against the Major Scholars', www.spubs.com.

61. 'Are the Asharees from Ahl Us-Sunnah Wal-Jamaaʼah?' www.spubs.com.

62. Ibid.

63. al-Fawzan, 'Tanbihat ʻAla Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', p. 58.

64. Ibid., p. 78.

65. Ibid., pp. 59–60.

66. Ibid.

67. *Al-Muntaqa Min Fatawa Fadilat Al-Shaykh Al-Duktur Salih Ibn Fawzan Ibn ʻAbd Allah Al-Fawzan*, vol. 1, p. 93.

68. 'Tanbihat ʻAla Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', p. 89.

69. Ibid., p. 59.

70. Al-Sabuni is the author against whom Ibn Baz wrote this pamphlet to blame him for allowing interpretation of the ambiguous religious texts.

71. Ibn Baz, *Tanbihat Fi Al-Radd ʻAla Man Taʼawwala Al-Sifat*, p. 19.

72. Ibid., p. 21.

73. 'Historical Development of the Methodologies of al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimeen and their Effect and Influence upon Contemporary Salafee Dawah: Part 1,' www.spubs.com.

74. 'Historical Development of the Methodologies of Al-Ikhwaan Al-Muslimeen and Their Effect and Influence Upon Contemporary Salafee Dawah: Part 1', www.spubs.com also in full in Muhammad Rabi' Ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, 'The Crime of Taymee' Upon the Salafi Manhaj', www.spubs.com.

75. Examples of such lists can be seen here: 'Biographies of Scholars and Saint's', sunnah.org, http://www.sunnah.org/history/Scholars/Default.htm. In contrast, there is a website www.fatwa-online.com, which claims to receive 25,000 hits a day, and which has a section entitled biographies, organised in centuries (a column for the first century, then one for the second etc., until the fifteenth century AH). All the centuries are empty except for the eighth century AH where Ibn Taymiyya's biography has been entered, and then nothing again until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries where many biographies of Saudi preachers have been entered. All the others mention 'No biographies currently listed'. This does not mean that the owners of the website do not acknowledge any other scholars than those listed (as Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab do not figure in this list either), and the lack of names in the other centuries might simply be attributed to a lack of time and resources on the part of the webmasters who probably had the intention to fill in all the centuries. However, what this does demonstrate is that the first readily available biographies that they could think of and that they took the time to add to the list was Ibn Taymiyya's biography and the biographies of some current figures as well as some famous Wahhabis from the past century. This was in 2009. As of 2018, the website is still active and under 'Biographies of Scholars' it only has 'fourteenth and fifteenth century'.

76. Ibn Baz, *Tanbihat Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ta'awwala Al-Sifat*, pp. 9–10.

77. Ibid., p. 16.

78. al-Fawzan, 'Tanbihat 'Ala Maqalat Al-Sabuni Fi Al-Sifat', p. 61.

79. A contemporary Saudi cleric who is referred to on various issues. I am unsure about his official occupation but he is among those Salafists who support loyalty to the Saudi government.

80. Muhammad 'Umar Bazmul, "Où Étudier?"' <http://www.salafs.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=218>.

81. 'Historical Development of the Methodologies of Al-Ikhwaan Al-Muslimeen and Their Effect and Influence Upon Contemporary Salafee Dawah: Part 1.' Available at: www.spubs.com (accessed 8 August 2016).

82. Abu l-'Abbas, 'Bakkah.Net Copyright Policy', Bakkah.net, http://www.bakkah.net/articles/copyright.htm.

83. Ibn Baz, *Tanbihat Fi Al-Radd 'Ala Man Ta'awwala Al-Sifat*, pp. 17–18.
84. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatawa*, vol. 4, p. 156.
85. Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Attributes of God*, pp. 118–19.

Chapter 6   Case Studies on the Debate Around the Attributes of God and its Consequences

1. Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber Islamic Environments*, Critical Studies on Islam; (London: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 5.
2. Abu Usama ath-Thahabi, 'The Correct Understanding of Allah's Attributes' (2011).
3. Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya, 'Creed of Hamawiyyah – Chapter 16: Affirming Two Eyes (Aynain) for Allaah' (2008).
4. Abdullah al-Farsi, 'Questions on Asmaa Was-Sifaat', Ahya.org, http://bit.ly/EyesEars.
5. Ibid.
6. As we saw, al-Ash'ari denounced this argument by saying that in some cases there is a need to deny things that are impossible about God, otherwise, if asked if his God performs hajj or gets married then the Muslim would say that he cannot deny it because there is no explicit text saying that He does not. Al-Kawthari was of the view that the verse negating all resemblance to God [Q 42: 11] should have been a strong enough proof against all sorts of anthropomorphism concerning the belief in God. al-Kawthari, *Maqalat Al-Kawthari*, p. 395.
7. Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, 'The Muslim's Belief', http://al-mustaqeem.tripod.com/id25.html.
8. The *Dajjal* is the name of the Antichrist (the Deceiver) whose arrival on earth is believed by Muslims to be one of the signs that will precede the final hour.
9. al-Farsi. 'Questions on Asmaa Was-Sifaat.' Available at: http://bit.ly/Eyes Ears (accessed 9 September 2016).
10. http://ahlussunnah.boards.net/thread/252/answering-imran-dawah-mansur-rahman.
11. Abu Adam al-Narujiy, 'The Difference between Wahabi Creed and Islam', https://sunnianswers.wordpress.com/2010/08/16/the-difference-between-the-wahabi-creed-and-islam/.
12. Gabriel Hernandez, 'Comment on the Difference between Wahabi Creed and Islam', Sunnianswers.wordpress.com https://sunnianswers.wordpress.

com/2010/08/16/the-difference-between-the-wahabi-creed-and-islam/#comment-2192.

13. Abu Adam al-Narujiy, 'Comment on the Difference between Wahabi Creed and Islam', Sunnianswers.wordpress.com https://sunnianswers.wordpress.com/2010/08/16/the-difference-between-the-wahabi-creed-and-islam/#comment-2194.

14. 'Anthropomorphism, the First Step Towards Atheism', https://sunnianswers.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/anthropomorphism-the-first-step-towards-atheism/.

15. 'Q&a About the Words "Hand" and "Face" https://sunnianswers.wordpress.com/2008/11/23/qa-about-the-words-hand-and-face/.

16. In a December 2012 video that is among his first ones, is an 'advice' to Spubs. 'AbdulRahman Hassan, 'Advice to Salafipublications Part 2,' PearlsOfKnowledge, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9kkj3yi6DY.

17. The Khilafah debate, 'The Khilafah Debate', YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efRjbd5-kMA [47'01–47'19].

18. 'AbdulHaq Al-Ashanti and Abu 'Ameenah 'AbdurRahman Bennet, 'A Warning against the Website Salafimedia.Com,' Brixtonmasjid.co.uk, http://brixtonmasjid.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SalafiManhaj_25Differences.pdf.

19. Ibid.

20. From 3:52: 'AbdulRahman Hassan and Asrar Rashid, 'Sunni Vs Wahabi | Unedited Debate | Is Seeking Help from the Prophet ﷺ Shirk?,' YouTube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYRKuquV7_M.

21. Ibid.

22. 'Abdul-Quddus, 'Journey through Islam', https://khalas.wordpress.com/2007/03/16/i-left-islam/.

23. He mentions in his accounts that he was using a translation published by Darussalaam, the main Saudi publishing house in terms of religious materials. It is most probably the one which is widely circulated for free in the English-speaking world, with the title 'Interpretations of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language, by Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali'.

24. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4vXbqTp7Us (acessed 31 August 2016).

25. http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/rebuttals/zawadi/allahs_pyhsical_image.html (accessed 31 August 2016).

26. Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, 'Commentary on the Hadeeth, "Allaah Created Adam in His Image"', Islamqa.com, https://islamqa.info/en/20652.

27. Ibid.

28. *Ash'ari* scholars used to take great care to take into account the fact that the debater might not accept the Qur'an as a proof if he or she is not Muslim and that therefore there must be arguments from the sound mind to explain the truthfulness of Islam according to them.

29. Aymenn Jawad, 'This Is Our Aqeeda and This Is Our Manhaj: Islam 101 According to the Islamic State', http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-is-our-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam#continued.

30. Faisal. 'Let's Call a Spade a Spade'. Available at: http://www.authentictauheed.com/2015/01/notes-audio-lets-call-spade-spade-part-1.html (accessed 25 August 2016).

31. Romain Caillet to Jihadologie, 8 juin, 2017, http://bit.ly/ISDissidents.

Conclusion   Scholarly and Strategic Implications of the Study

1. Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'.

2. Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, *'Aqida Ahl Al-Sunna Wa-Al-Jama'A*, 3rd ed. (Madina: al-Jami'a al-Islamiyya, 1988).

3. www.binbaz.org.sa.

4. Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and Its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus Books, 2002), pp. 31–2.

5. For example, many possible interpretations of this *hadith* which rule out that the hadith means 'the form of God' are found in Ibn Furak, *Kitab Mushkil Al-Hadith Wa-Bayanuh*, pp. 6–31; al-Bayhaqi, 'Kitab Al-Asma' Wa Al-Sifat', 290 and 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allah al-Juwayni, *Al-Shamil Fi Usul Al-Din* (Alexandria: Munsha'a al-Ma'arif, 1969), pp. 560–1.

6. Simon Ross Valentine, *Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 75.

7. Jawad. 'This Is Our Aqeeda and This Is Our Manhaj: Islam 101 According to the Islamic State'. Available at: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-is-our-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam#continued (accessed 5 December 2015).

8. Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, p. 32.

9. Mezri Haddad, 'Le Wahhabisme, Négation De L'islam', http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/2008/02/21/le-wahhabisme-negation-de-l-islam_65607.

10. Al Jazeera, 'Bin Nayef Receives Cia Award for "Counter-Terrorism"', 12 February 2017.

11. Scott Shane, 'Saudis and Extremism: "Both the Arsonists and Firefighters"', New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/26/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-islam.html.

12. Jerome Drevon, 'Embracing Salafi Jihadism in Egypt and Mobilizing in the Syrian Jihad', *Middle East Critique* (2016), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19436149.2016.1206272.

13. al-Shahrastani, *Milal*, p. 108.

Appendix   Two Detailed Interpretations by Al-Razi

1. Feras Q. Hamza, Rizvi Sajjad and Mayer Farhana, eds. *An Anthology of Quranic Commentaries. Vol. 1, on the Nature of the Divine*, Qur'anic Studies Series 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 100–101.

2. Ibid., p. 385.

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